

**SING WITH THE
UNDERSTANDING**

G. R. BALLEINE

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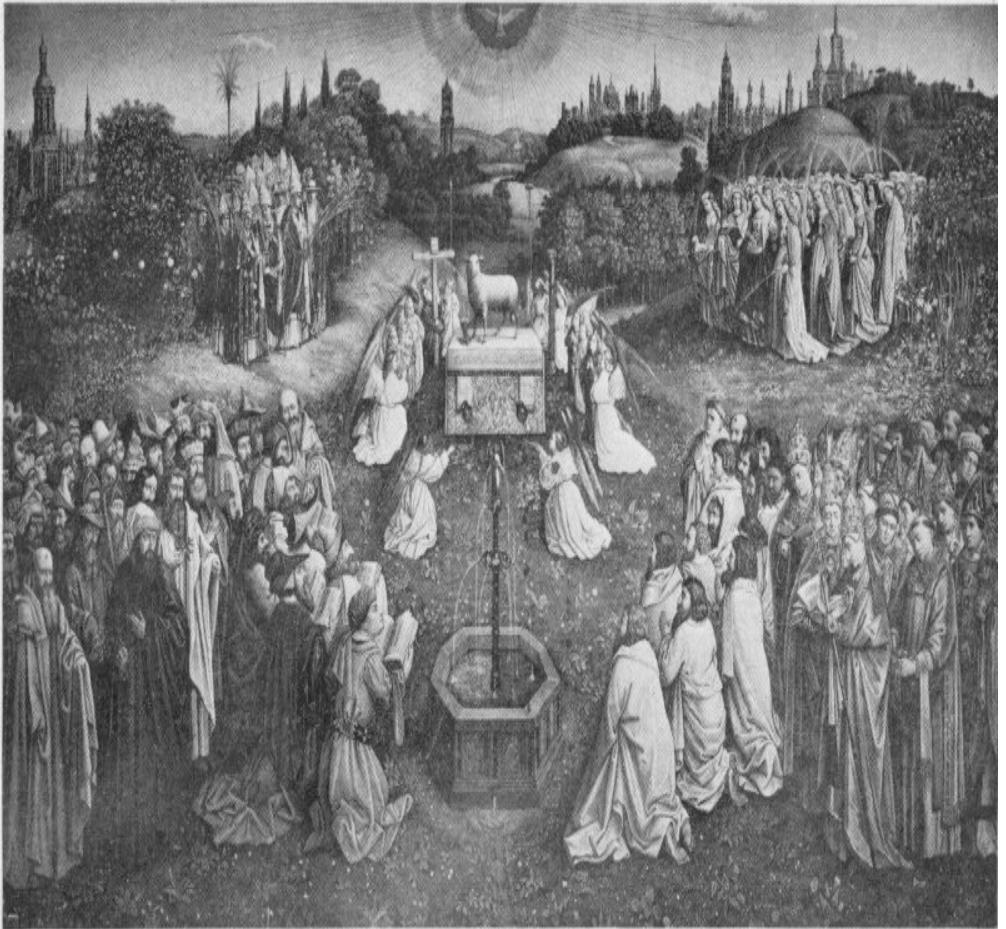
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The Adoration of the Lamb

by Hubert and Jan van Eyck

(See [page 174](#))

W. F. Mansell photo

SING WITH THE UNDERSTANDING

SOME HYMN PROBLEMS UNRAVELLED

G. R. Balleine

“I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.”

ST. PAUL (1 Corinthians xiv. 15).



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ABBREVIATIONS

The letters in the footnotes at the beginning of each chapter indicate a few of the books in which the particular hymn that is to be discussed can be found. They also give some idea as to how widespread its use is.

- A.M. *Hymns Ancient and Modern with Second Supplement.* 1924.
- Am. *The Hymnal of the Protestant Episcopal Church in America.* 1940.
- A.M.R. *Hymns Ancient and Modern Revised.* 1950.
- Bp. *The Baptist Church Hymnal. Revised Edition.* 1933.
- Can. *The Book of Common Praise, being the Hymn Book of the Church of England in Canada.* 1910.
- Cong. *The Congregational Hymnary.* 1948.
- Cong.P. *Congregational Praise.* 1951.
- E.H. *The English Hymnal.* 1906.
- Irish *The Irish Church Hymnal With Appendix.* 1941.
- Meth. *The Methodist Hymn Book.* 1933.
- Presb. *The Church Hymnary. (Presbyterian.) Revised Edition.* 1927.
- R.C. *The Westminster Hymnal. (Roman Catholic.)*

Revised Edition. 1950.

S.P. *Songs of Praise*. 1931.

FOREWORD

Ideally hymns should contain no obscure words or allusions. If you hand me a hymn-book and invite me to join in the singing, I ought to be able to do so without suddenly having to stop and think, “What on earth do these words mean?” Most good hymns pass this test. “Sun of my soul,” for example, contains not a thought or expression that would puzzle the average scullery-maid. Of the twenty-nine words in its first verse twenty-six are of one syllable. It is surprising how fond the best hymn-writers are of monosyllables, e.g. twenty-eight out of twenty-nine words in the first verse of “Fight the good fight,” twenty-four out of twenty-five words in the first verse of “Stand up and bless the Lord.” But all are not so considerate. Sometimes congregations resemble the

two little birds in a wood
Who sang hymns whenever they could.
What the words were about
They could never make out;
But they thought that it did them some good.

They enjoy hymn-singing, if the tune goes with a good swing. They assume that the words express sentiments that they ought to share. And community-singing of any kind, whether

the song be “The Red Flag” or “Abide with me,” psychologically always stirs up a pleasant thrill of emotion. But often there is truth in the sneer of one of Mr. Thompson’s characters in *Lancashire Lather*: “Look at hymns. You don’t care how daft a hymn is, if you think you are making a worshipful noise.”

This is not entirely our fault. It is partly due to the fact that hymn-writers once could take it for granted that every church-goer had an intimate knowledge of his Bible. The older books are full of allusions that would puzzle most people today. Watts could refer quite casually to “the chariots of Amminadib,” Wesley could exhort his converts to rejoice because “Zerubbabel is near,” and John Newton could assume that his Olney congregation would know what he meant when he cried in that magnificent hymn, “Begone unbelief”:

Each sweet Ebenezer I have in review
Confirms His good pleasure to help me right through.

Modern editors have weeded out many of these recondite expressions; but they still expect “Kedar’s tents,” and “Pisgah’s mountain,” and “the hosts of Midian,” even the “Stem of Jesse’s Rod” to mean something to us.

I fear they are too optimistic. Picture the annoyance of Churchwarden Bullock, who has been singing lustily, “Though like the wanderer the sun gone down” or “Bright the vision that delighted once the sight of Judah’s seer,” if you suddenly whispered, “Who was the wanderer?” or “Who was the seer?” Even the Rev. Lucius Lectern, the newly ordained Deacon fresh from his Theological College, might be puzzled to explain that line in “Crown Him with many crowns,” “Fruit

of the Mystic Rose as of that Rose the Stem”; while Mrs. Gubbins, the church-cleaner, almost certainly imagines that the “book which heavenly lore imparts” is the Bible.

The following chapters try to unravel a few of these obscurities. May they help some readers to join St. Paul in his resolve, “I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the understanding also,” remembering George Herbert’s lines:

The fineness which a Hymn or Psalm affords
Is when the soul unto the lines accords.

CHAPTER I

HYMNS OF ALL NATIONS

Hail, gladdening Light

A.M.; E.H.; A.M.R.; Meth.; Presb.; Cong.; Cong.P.; Irish; Can.; Am.

Almost every Religion seems to have worshipped its Gods with song. The clay tablets of Babylon three thousand years old are full of hymns to Tammuz and Istar and Merodach. The papyri of Egypt contain hundreds of hymns to Ra and Amen and Osiris. One written about 1200 B.C. begins:

Homage to Thee Who art Ra,
Lord of Heaven and Earth,
Creator of all in the Heights
And all who dwell in the Deeps!
Hail, King of the World!
Hail, Lord of Eternity!
Ruler Everlasting!

India was chanting its Vedic Hymns about 800 B.C.; and in Greece the Homeric Hymn to Demeter is assigned to the same century. St. Paul in his sermon on Mars' Hill quoted another Greek pagan hymn, written by Cleanthes:

Thee it is meet that mortals should invoke,
For we Thine offspring are.

Later Horace was writing in Rome, “Sing to Diana,
gentle maids,” ending with a kindly prayer that Plague
and Famine might be banished from Italy and—sent to
Britain! Even Confucianism, which has never regarded its
Founder as a God, intones hymns in his praise:

Confucius! Confucius!
Great indeed art Thou, Confucius!
Before Thee was none like Thee!
After Thee has been none like Thee!
Confucius! Confucius!
Great indeed art Thou, Confucius!

Among the Jews, after their return from exile, Psalm-singing
became a highly developed art:

Praise Him in the sound of the trumpet!
Praise Him upon the lute and harp!

Three large choirs of professional singers, called after early
musicians, the Sons of Asaph, the Sons of Heman, and the
Sons of Korah, were on duty daily in the Temple, and we still
have in our present Psalter the hymn-book that they used.

So the Christian Church inherited from its start a great
tradition of Psalm-singing. At the close of the Last Supper we
read that our Lord and His Apostles, “when they had sung a
hymn, went out into the Mount of Olives.” When St. Paul and
Silas were in prison at Philippi with their legs in the stocks,
“at midnight they sang praises unto God, and the prisoners

heard them.” The Epistle to the Ephesians urges its readers: “Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.” And St. James wrote: “Is any merry? Let him sing Psalms.” Even the heathen noticed that singing was a conspicuous feature in Christian worship. When Pliny wrote his report to the Emperor Trajan about A.D. 105 on the doings of the Christians in Bithynia, he said: “They assemble together early in the morning and sing a song to Christ as God.”

The oldest hymn-book of the Church was the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Psalms into Greek; but, taking these as a model, before long Christians began to produce fresh Psalms for themselves. Not however without opposition. Eusebius tells how Paul of Samosata, who was Bishop of Antioch from 260 to 270, suppressed “the Psalms that were being sung there in honour of our Lord Jesus Christ” on the ground that “they were novelties and the composition of men.” We shall find this point of view, that nothing should be sung in public worship but the Psalms of the Old Testament, cropping up with surprising frequency in the history of hymn-singing. Nevertheless the new Christian Psalms steadily won their way. The oldest collection yet discovered is the so-called *Odes of Solomon*, which cannot be later than A.D. 200, and may be considerably earlier. Whether this was originally compiled as a Christian hymn-book, or whether it is a Jewish hymn-book drastically re-edited for use at Christian meetings, is still a disputed point. But its forty-two prose-poems in the style of the Psalms are, says Rendel Harris, their editor, “redolent of antiquity, but radiant with spiritual light.”

All the oldest Christian hymns followed this pattern. One well-known example is the Greater Doxology, “Glory be to God on High. . . . We praise Thee, we bless Thee, we worship Thee, we glorify Thee, we give thanks to Thee for Thy great glory.” For seventeen hundred years this has been the daily Morning Hymn of the Eastern Church. When it reached the West and was translated into Latin, it became known as the *Gloria in Excelsis*, and was promoted to a place in the Roman Mass, and it still remains part of the Anglican Communion Service. The *Te Deum*, “We praise Thee, O God. We acknowledge Thee to be the Lord,” is another hymn of the same type, evidently composed by someone whose whole conception of hymn-writing was drawn from the Psalter.

The only hymn of this type to be found in modern hymn-books is the Greek *Phôs Hilaron* (Gladdening Light), the Sunset Canticle that is still sung daily throughout the Eastern Church. It is of unknown authorship and date, but as early as 370 St. Basil appealed to it as “an ancient document which the people recite,” and based a doctrinal argument on it, almost as though it were one of the authoritative Creeds of the Church. By his day it had become associated with the ceremony of the Lighting of the Lamps. Some years before, the *Apostolic Constitutions* had ordered the Faithful to assemble together every evening to sing Psalms and offer prayers. So the Greeks had turned the humdrum process of lighting the church lamps for Vespers, the Service held just before sunset, into an impressive and popular rite. Amid chanting of many Antiphons, “The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom then shall I fear?” “Thou, Lord, shalt light my lamp. Lord, make my darkness light,” one Deacon brought in the little saucer-shaped lamps; another Deacon

lighted them; the Priest chanted the One Hundred and Fourth Psalm, "Man goeth forth to his work and to his labour until the evening"; and the people sang together this very simple little hymn: "Now, as we come to the sun's hour of rest and the lights of evening round us shine, we turn to Christ, the gladsome Light Who proceeds from the glory of the Father. Worthy art Thou at all times to be hymned with undefiled tongues, Son of God, Giver of life. Therefore the whole world glorifies Thee." Most hymn-books choose John Keble's translation, "Hail, gladdening Light," set to Stainer's tune *Sebaste*; but *English Hymnal* gives a version by Robert Bridges, the late Poet Laureate.

Other well-known hymns in our books come from Greek sources, for example, "The day is past and over," "Christian, dost thou see them?" "Come, ye faithful, raise the strain," and "The day of resurrection," but these are the work of a later generation of Greek hymnists, and remained entirely unknown in England, till Neale published in 1862 his *Hymns of the Eastern Church*. So the study of these can be postponed till we come to the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER II

THE CONQUERING CROSS

*The Royal Banners forward go.
Sing, my tongue, the glorious battle.*

A.M.; E.H.; A.M.R.; S.P.; Meth.; Presb.; Cong.P.; R.C.; Can.; Am.

Hymns in Greek like *Phôs Hilaron* were useless in the West, where everyone spoke Latin; but by the fourth century Italians, Gauls and Spaniards were beginning to write hymns in Latin. A great stimulus was given to this in 384, when the Empress Justina, who was a follower of the heretic Arius, tried to seize for her sect one of the churches in Milan. Ambrose, the Bishop, shut himself up in it with a crowd of Catholics, and Augustine, who was in Milan at the time, tells how “the people kept ward in the church ready to die with their Bishop, and my mother was one of them.” “To save them,” he says, “from being worn out by their long vigil,” Ambrose produced a bundle of Latin hymns that he had written, and the siege developed into an all-day and all-night choir-practice. “Thus it was,” he continues, “that the Eastern custom of hymn-singing began among us, and from that day to this it has been retained, and almost all congregations throughout the rest of the world now follow our example.”

Ambrose is the first great name in Latin hymnody, and translations of some of his hymns are in modern hymnals (e.g. A.M. 9, 10 and 11); these however are mainly museum pieces, interesting for their antiquity, but too cold and stiff to make much appeal today. Prudentius, the next great Latin hymnist, is more to our taste, but his hymns, e.g. “Earth hath many a noble city,” need little exposition. When we reach however the Passiontide Processionals of Venantius Fortunatus, the *Vexilla Regis* and the *Pange Lingua*—“The Royal Banners forward go” and “Sing, my tongue, the glorious battle”—comment is clearly called for.

We know exactly when and why these hymns were written. The story begins with the Empress Helena, the mother of Constantine (whom Geoffrey of Monmouth asserts to have been a daughter of the legendary King Coel of Colchester, who called for his fiddlers three). In 326, as an old lady of seventy-nine, she visited Jerusalem, and was said to have discovered the Cross on which Christ had been crucified. The story ran that she found a Jew who knew where the Cross was hidden, and kept him at the bottom of a pit until he revealed the secret. Her servants then dug on the spot and unearthed three crosses. Which was the right one? Just then a funeral conveniently passed. The dead man was laid on each cross in turn, and, as soon as he touched the third, he was restored to life, a sure sign that they had found what they were seeking. This story cannot be true. Only seven years later a Bordeaux pilgrim describes the sights which every Christian was taken to see in Jerusalem, the house of Caiaphas, the pillar of scourging, the Judgement Hall, Calvary, and the cave of the Resurrection; but he says not a word of the Cross. In 338 Eusebius wrote an account of the Empress’s visit. But he too

makes no mention of her sensational discovery. Nevertheless not much later something must have happened which caused the Church in Jerusalem to believe that the Cross had been found; for they began to send out splinters of it to other Churches. In 348 Cyril of Jerusalem wrote in his *Catechetical Lectures*, “The whole world is now filled with portions of the wood of the Cross.”

Two centuries and a half passed, and in 569, Radegunde, Queen of the Franks, founded a nunnery at Poitiers, and the Emperor Justin II sent from Constantinople one of these fragments to be placed in her high altar. This relic was met three miles from the city by a long procession of clergy, bearing banners and censers; and it was for this ceremony that Fortunatus, the Queen’s Chaplain, wrote his two great hymns. One small point in the first perhaps calls for comment. The Cross is treated as the Banner of Victory. Why then does it speak of “Royal Banners” in the plural? In medieval processions the large Banner of the Cross was usually escorted by a number of small ones, exhibiting the instruments of the Passion. The second hymn catalogues some of these, the nails, the spear, the vinegar, the gall, the reed. And no doubt this was the case in Radegunde’s procession.

Being written in the sixth century, both hymns are naturally coloured by ideas that were prevalent then. One strange tradition was that, when Adam was dying, he sent his son Seth to the Garden of Eden to beg forgiveness for his sin; but the Angel at the Gate replied, “The time of pardon is not yet. Thousands of years must pass ere Paradise can be regained. But the wood whereby Redemption will be won shall grow from thy father’s tomb.” And he gave Seth three

seeds from the Tree of Life. When he returned, his father was dead; so he put the seeds in his mouth, and buried him on Golgotha. From them three trees grew, which intertwined into one. Solomon cut this down for his palace; but, as it would not fit, he threw it into the Pool of Bethesda, which became a Pool of Healing. On Good Friday it rose to the surface, and the soldiers used it to make the Cross. This complicated story lies behind Fortunatus' statement in his first hymn that the Cross was "culled from a worthy stock," which he expands in his second:

He, our Maker, deeply grieving
That the first-made Adam fell,
When he ate the fruit forbidden,
Whose reward was death and hell,
Marked e'en then this Tree, the ruin
Of the first tree to dispel.

Ancient and Modern Revised has dropped this verse, though the older edition retained it.

More startling was a theory of the Atonement that was widely believed at this time. It arose from the text, "The Son of Man came to give his life a ransom for many." A ransom is something that sets you free, and it was the experience of thousands that the Cross had set them free from the grip of sin. So it seemed a very suitable word, till someone asked, "To whom was the ransom paid?" Irenaeus made the amazing suggestion, "To Satan." Origen elaborated this idea; and it was accepted even by Augustine and Gregory the Great. It was said that mankind had fallen by sin into slavery to Satan, and Christ wished to redeem us. But Satan, who

realized that Jesus was his most dangerous Enemy, would accept no lower price for his slaves than the death of the Redeemer. So Jesus consented to be crucified. But all the time He knew that He was playing a trick on Satan, who had not foreseen the Resurrection! St. Augustine even calls the Cross “the mousetrap” in which Satan was caught!

Thus the work for our salvation
He ordained to be done,
To the traitor’s art opposing
Art yet deeper than his own.

Or, as the *English Hymnal* translates it:

That the manifold deceiver’s
Art by art might be outweighed.

This verse too is dropped in *Ancient and Modern Revised*.

A statement which naturally puzzles those who like to sing with understanding is the assertion that “in true prophetic song of old” David had foretold that God would reign over the heathen “from the Tree.” No such prophecy can be found in the Psalter either in the Hebrew or the Septuagint or the Vulgate. But in the Early Middle Ages Psalters were in circulation in which the tenth verse of the Ninety-sixth Psalm ran: “Tell it out among the Heathen that the Lord is reigning from the tree (*a ligno*).” Justin Martyr and Tertullian both knew that reading, and Fortunatus’ Psalter evidently contained these two unauthentic words.

But, if we leave David out of the question, it remains true that the Cross is the throne from which Christ rules the world. As

soon as the Persecution ceased, and the Church could come out into the open, it adopted the Cross as its symbol. This was rather surprising. Crucifixion was everywhere regarded as the most disgusting and disgraceful form of death, a form of execution reserved for criminals of the lowest type. We might have expected the Church to view the Cross with shuddering horror. But Fortunatus hailed it as “Tree of glory, Tree most fair.” The Church marked every new convert with the sign of the Cross. When a building was set apart for public worship it was marked by a consecration cross. When Augustine and his missionary monks marched into Canterbury, a cross was carried at their head. Through all its history the Christian Religion has centred round the Cross.

These hymns were written for the reception of a relic that was thought to be part of the Cross, but neither says a word about the relic. Their whole theme is the Cross itself, the Victorious Cross, the Cross that has spoiled and is spoiling the Spoiler of his prey, the Cross that has freed millions of souls from the bondage of sin, the Cross that has been carried from land to land till today there is hardly a tribe on earth that has not heard its message, the Cross that has been the strongest inspiration for every fight against evil. Fortunatus may have had a strange idea as to how the Cross could save. Theories of the Atonement come and go, and we are bound by none of them. But the fact remains beyond all dispute that throughout the ages the Cross has proved the most potent power for transforming men’s lives. Christ’s words, Christ’s works, all have their influence; but it is “from the Tree” that He reigns. Two questions may reasonably be asked of those who sing these hymns: Has the Cross yet won its victory over

your own life? Are you willing to be a Cross-bearer, helping to carry the Cross forward to yet greater victories?

There are many versions of these hymns in English, including one by Keble and one by Bishop Walsham How, but most books have adopted or adapted those which Neale made for his *Medieval Hymns*. The plainsong tune to each hymn is the one to which the Latin words have been sung from the beginning, though most modern books add a second tune as an alternative. The *Vexilla* plainsong however suggests magnificently the feeling of a stately procession moving majestically forward. Dante's *Inferno* shows how familiar the hymn was in his day, for the first canto begins with a parody of it: "The banners of the King of Hell advance."

CHAPTER III

ST. PATRICK'S BREASTPLATE

I bind unto myself today

A.M.; E.H.; A.M.R.; Meth.; Presb.; Cong.P.; Irish; Am.

One hymn in our books may be a hundred years older than Fortunatus. It is known as St. Patrick's Breastplate, and, if he was really the author, it must have been written in the middle of the fifth century. The tradition that attributes it to him is by no means incredible. Its language is so extremely archaic that some of the words baffle the best Irish scholars, and its background fits the age of the early missions. Ireland was evidently still largely heathen. The writer prays for deliverance from the black laws of paganism, the incantations of false prophets, and the hostile men who bar his course. He himself has not entirely shaken off his awe of the Druids, and asks to be delivered from their spells.

St. Patrick's home was in South Wales; but somewhere about the year 400, when he was a lad of sixteen, he was kidnapped by Irish raiders, and for six years worked as a slave in Ireland, and so learnt to speak Irish. He then escaped to Gaul on a ship exporting Irish wolf-hounds, and entered a monastery. In

middle life he began to feel that God was calling him to return to Ireland as a missionary, and with great difficulty he persuaded the Church authorities to let him go.

He was almost the first missionary to try to convert barbarians. Hitherto nearly all the triumphs of the Church had been won inside the Roman Empire. In Asia Minor, Egypt and North Africa, in Greece and Italy and Spain, in Gaul and Britain the people had been for centuries comparatively civilized. There were towns and roads, law courts and schools, and books were bought and studied. Ireland however had never formed part of the Empire. It was still a bear-garden of warring clans who worshipped outlandish deities, and lived in daily awe of the black magic of the Druids. It is interesting to see what kind of hymn the missionaries gave these wild men of the bogs and mountains.

One feature of Irish paganism was the immense importance attached to charms and incantations. The repetition of certain rhymes was supposed to ward off every danger. The missionaries took advantage of this, and encouraged their converts to learn hymns for the same purpose. These hymns were called Loricæ, the Latin word for “breastplates.” Our present hymn is one of them. Its ancient Irish preface declares: “This is a breastplate for the protection of body and soul. Whoever sings it every day with pious thought of God, devils shall not stand before him. It will save him from every poison, shield him from sudden death, and, when he dies, it will safeguard his soul.”

Several English translations exist, but most hymnals have chosen the excellent one by Mrs. Alexander, wife of the

Bishop of Derry, whose children's hymns, "There is a green hill" and "Do no sinful action" are known everywhere. In the original the opening line is *Atomriug indiu niurt tren togairm Trinoit*. A literal translation of the first verse runs: "I bind unto myself today [or, according to some scholars, "Today I arise in] that mighty force, the invocation of the Trinity. I believe that the Creator of all creation is Three in One and One in Three."

These missionaries did not dodge the more difficult articles of their Creed. They preached no vague shadowy Deity; they made no attempt to identify their God with the local Gods of the Irish. They preached inflexibly the God of the Creeds, Who was Three in One and One in Three. But the soundest of Creeds is useless unless you act on it, as useless as a railway timetable to a man who never enters a train. So Patrick taught the Irish, not only to believe in God, but every day to place their lives in His keeping:

I bind unto myself today
The strong Name of the Trinity.

John McNeil, the Scottish Evangelist, used to say that Religion first became real to him, when, as a boy lying in bed, he heard his quarryman father say every morning as he started for work, "I go forth in the strength of the Lord."

But the Triune God has been "manifested in the flesh" in the Person of Jesus Christ; so these Irish were taught to remind themselves of all they had learnt about Him. The Anglican Catechism says, "Reharse the Articles of thy Belief." "Herse" was Old English for "a harrow." To herse a field meant to harrow it, to turn the clods over and over.

To re-herse was to harrow it again. To rehearse our Creed is to turn each clause over in our mind, till nothing remains buried and dormant, Christ's incarnation, His baptism, His death on the Cross, "His bursting from the spiced tomb," His ascension, "His coming at the Day of Doom." This is what Patrick trained his converts to do.

The next verse reminds them of the tremendous background behind their Religion, the ministry of Angels, the preaching of the Apostles, the death of the Martyrs, the "good deeds done" by innumerable faithful Saints. Then the hymn looks in a new direction. Irish Paganism was Nature Worship. Christianity might seem to be rashly challenging the stupendous powers of Nature. If you joined the Church, the thunder and lightning, the storm and the tempest, would all be leagued against you. Patrick emphatically denied this. He asserted that the God of the Creeds was the God of Nature. Every Christian could claim as allies "the star-lit heaven," "the glorious sun," "the deep salt sea," and so on.

Then the thought turns back again Godwards. Someone has said: "The value of a Religion depends entirely on the sufficiency of its idea of God." These Irish rehearsed in their minds all that their God would do for them; He would hold them up, so that they would be safe; His Eye would watch over them; His Ear would ever be open to their prayers; He would teach, and guide, and shield. And, the hymn adds, they would need His help against "the snares of sin," "the natural lusts that war within," "false words of heresy," "knowledge that defiles," and many another danger.

The seventh verse in the Irish contains some lines which Mrs. Alexander in her English version has rather watered down, lines which remind us that they were written in the fifth century, not the twentieth, in days when Paganism was still powerful, and even Christians were still a trifle afraid of its wizardry. In the original Irish they claim God's help against "all the wiles of idolatry, the spells of women" (for women were supposed to have knowledge of which mere men knew nothing), "the spells of the smiths" (the wandering tinkers who also had jealously guarded secrets), and, most dangerous of all, the awful "spells of the Druids." In one museum is an ancient map of the world on which the maker has covered all the unexplored parts of Asia and Africa with warnings, "Here be Dragons!" "Here be Gryffons!" "Here be Vampires!" But followers of St. Francis used that map in planning their missionary journeys, and they scratched out these alarming inscriptions and substituted in every case, "Here be God!" Faith in God removes all fears, baseless or well-founded. Bishop Westcott said: "A Christian is one who throws himself with absolute confidence on the Living Lord." This is the spirit which the missionaries instilled into their Irish converts.

Then the hymn changes its beat, both in the Irish and English. The Irish here is so very archaic that lines 5 and 6 puzzle every expert. Some would translate them: "Christ in the Fort, Christ in the Chariot-seat, Christ on the Poop." But, whichever translation is right, what a charming picture this verse gives us of the Comrade Christ, Christ our daily Companion, whatever we do!

The closing verse returns to the thought with which we began: "I bind unto myself the strong Name of the Trinity." Taken as

a whole the hymn is a magnificent study in Faith. The Irish name for it is *Faed Fiada*, the Deer's cry, a reference to the Psalm, "Like as the deer desireth the water brooks, so longeth my soul after Thee, O God." This suggests how we should use it. We too are beset with dangers, and our only hope of safety lies in "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit." We need to bind to ourselves all the powers of the Blessed Trinity.

No one knows to what tune the Irish words were sung; but most books set the main part of Mrs. Alexander's version to a traditional Irish melody, which once belonged to the Latin words of "Jesu, the very thought is sweet." The verse where the rhythm changes is differently treated by different editors.

CHAPTER IV

VENI CREATOR

Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire

A.M.; E.H.; A.M.R.; Meth.; Cong.; Cong.P.; Bp.; Presb.; S.P.; Irish; Can.; Am.

Of the old Latin hymns the most familiar is the *Veni Creator*, of which an abridged translation, “Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire,” is found in almost every hymnal. No one has discovered who wrote it. It has been attributed to St. Ambrose, St. Gregory the Great, Charlemagne, and Rabanus Maur, an Archbishop of Mainz; but these are guesses based on no jot of evidence, and the first three are highly improbable. Like many other famous hymns from the *Te Deum* downwards we must label it “Author unknown.” It first appears in manuscripts of the tenth century.

It was primarily a Whitsuntide hymn, used at Terce, the Office held at the third hour of the day, the time when the first disciples were filled with the Spirit. But for the last nine hundred years no Church Council or Synod has met, no Pope has been elected, no Bishop consecrated, no Priest ordained, no King crowned, without the singing of this hymn. Its use was by no means confined to the walls of churches. Joinville,

when describing the departure in 1248 of Louis IX for the Crusade, says: “When the Priests embarked, the Captain made them mount to the ship’s castle, and, as they sang the *Veni Creator*, the mariners set sail.” When Joan of Arc marched out of Blois to relieve Orleans, Pasquerel, her Confessor, writes: “She made the Priests lead the march, and the soldiers followed, all singing *Veni Creator*.” In the Middle Ages rubrics ordered the bells to be pealed, incense to be burnt, and the best vestments to be worn, whenever these words were sung. In some French cathedrals flowers of varied colours were scattered from the triforium to illustrate how great is the diversity in the gifts of the Spirit, fragments of flaming tow were dropped, and flights of doves were released, all to impress on the people the importance of this appeal to the Holy Spirit.

When the English Prayer-book was compiled, the Reformers felt that they could not omit this historic hymn from the Ordinal, and their translation of it into English verse, “Come, Holy Ghost, eternal God,” can still be found there. But this was far too long-winded. For example, it spins out three Latin Words, which mean “Give peace now,” into:

And help us to obtain
Peace in our hearts with God and man,
The best and truest gain.
Of strife and of dissension
Dissolve, O Lord, the bands,
And knit the knots of peace and love
Throughout all Christian lands.

Forty words for three! So, when the Prayer-book was revised in 1662 a conciser version was added, “Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire,” which Bishop Cosin had made thirty-five years before for his *Collection of Private Devotions*. There are more than fifty fuller translations, of which the best known are Dryden’s “Creator Spirit by Whose aid,” and Robert Bridges’ “Come, O Creator Spirit, come,” both of which are in the *English Hymnal*.

If the old version was too wordy, Cosin made the opposite mistake. He entirely ignored some points in the Latin, and he packed the remaining thoughts so tight, that it is not easy, as we sing, to grasp their full meaning. Why, for example, does the hymn speak of “the anointing Spirit,” and what are the “sevenfold gifts”? Let us look at some of these problems.

The first thing to do when we pray is to get into our minds some idea of the Person to Whom we are speaking. Who is this Holy Ghost Whom we are inviting to come? The hymn recalls in a brief creed what we believe about Him. “Thou the Anointing Spirit art.” Everyone in ancient days knew the meaning of anointing. The anointer summoned people to high and unexpected duties. Saul, a young farmer, was looking for lost donkeys, when Samuel “took a vial of oil and poured it on his head,” and commissioned him to be King. When Saul proved a failure, Samuel “took the horn of oil and anointed” the shepherd-lad David. Elisha was ploughing, when Elijah passed and anointed him to be a Prophet. Elisha anointed the young soldier Jehu, and bade him seize the throne. And the hymn asserts that the Holy Spirit moves invisibly among men calling people to definite tasks. For everyone He has a call of some kind, a vocation.

But He does more than impose a task. God's call is God's enabling. In Bible days the anointing implied endowment with the power needed to accomplish the work. And the hymn asserts that the Spirit grants to those whom He calls His "sevenfold gifts." Medieval theology loved to tie its teaching into neat little bunches of sevens, the Seven Deadly Sins, the Seven Cardinal Virtues, the Seven Works of Mercy, and so on; and in a verse in Isaiah it found Seven Gifts of the Spirit. Four are mental: *Wisdom*, which is common sense in an uncommon degree, the opposite of Stupidity; *Understanding*, ability to see the reason for things, the opposite of Misunderstanding; *Counsel*, which the Whitsuntide collect calls "a right judgement in all things," and *Knowledge*, the opposite of Ignorance. The other three are moral: *Ghostly* (i.e. spiritual) *Strength*, the opposite of Backbonelessness; *True Godliness*, Godlikeness, doing what God would do if He were in our place; and *Holy Fear*, the opposite of shallow Flippancy.

There is more to follow. His "blessed unction" (i.e. anointing) confers "comfort, life, and fire of love." The word "comfort" has changed its meaning since Cosin wrote. In Latin *fortis* means "strong." So to "fortify" is to "make strong" and "fortitude" is "courage," and in Old English "comfort" meant "strength." The chronicler of St. Edmond's speaks of a schoolmaster who "comforted his boys with the cane." In modern parlance he made them tough. How tough those early Christians were! No tortures could turn them from their faith. And this toughness was one of the Holy Spirit's gifts.

And His anointing gives Life. Psychologists declare that most of us are only half alive. Our powers are only half developed. We could do far more than we imagine.

'Tis life of which our souls are scant.
Life, and more life, is what we want.

Our physical vitality, our mental vitality, our spiritual vitality are flagging. The Nicene Creed reminds us that the Holy Spirit is the “Giver of Life.”

Another gift is “fire of love.” We know that our duty is to love God and to love our neighbours. But we are also conscious that our love is woefully tepid. There is no fire, no passion in it, till the Spirit makes it glow. And the hymn adds one truth more: “Where Thou art Guide no ill can come.” The Prayer-book teaches us to pray, “Grant that Thy Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts.” No one walks safer than those who in St. Paul’s words are “led by the Spirit.”

Here then is the Creed of the Holy Ghost laid down in this ancient hymn. Believing this we can now offer our prayers. The first is a startling one: “Our souls inspire.” The Latin hymn had three petitions, “Come! Visit! Fill!” Cosin compressed them into one arresting word, “Inspire.” We know that the Prophets were inspired, the Evangelists were inspired, that holy men of old spake as they were inspired by the Holy Ghost; but can modern bank clerks, lorry drivers, waitresses be inspired? Yes, says St. Peter, “the promise is to you and your children.” The Spirit can breathe into your mind as He did into the mind of Amos the herdsman or St. John the fisherman.

And inspired men become seers. They see things to which others are blind. By nature we are shockingly short-sighted. We notice everyone's faults and never observe their good points. We overlook innumerable opportunities of getting and giving help. Even when we see the surface of things we are sadly lacking in insight. So we pray: "Enable with perpetual light the dullness of our blinded sight."

We ask too for cheerful faces. We are responsible for what our faces say to other people. In one large firm of caterers the test applied to every would-be waitress is, Has she a pleasant smile? And God needs sunny-faced servants. Gloomy Christians are a libel on their Religion. "The fruit of the Spirit is joy." So we pray, "Anoint and cheer our soiled face." Then we can "serve the Lord with gladness"; and gladness is a form of service.

The next petition is, "Keep far our foes; give peace at home"; a life that never worries, that never gets entangled in squabbles, that maintains in every trial a perfect serenity of spirit. God, Who is "the Author of peace and Lover of concord," is the only Person Who can give us that delightful disposition.

And the last prayer is, "Teach us to know the Father, Son." Dryden translates this:

Give us Thyself, that we may see
The Father and the Son by Thee.

The words "of Both," so emphatically inserted in the last verse, are an echo of a theological controversy that was raging so fiercely, when this hymn was written, that it

eventually caused the schism between the Eastern and the Western Church. The West declared that the Holy Spirit “proceedeth from the Father and the Son.” The East preferred the phrase “from the Father through the Son.” Into this obscure dispute we need not intrude. All branches of the Church agree that the only reliable evidence about God must come from God Himself, and the only available Source of information is the Holy Spirit. Our Lord’s promise was, “He will guide you into all truth.”

The plainsong tune to which this hymn has been sung for eleven hundred years is attributed to St. Notker the Stammerer, a Church musician of the ninth century. An early Life of him says that one night he was kept awake by a creaking water-wheel, that was working by jerks owing to a shortage of water. And, as he listened, “straightway he composed this sweet melody.” And the hymn forms a good prayer for those who feel that their work lacks rhythm and regularity, because it has not behind it a sufficient flow of power. “Ye shall receive power after the Holy Ghost is come upon you.”

CHAPTER V

FAREWELL TO ALLELUIA

Alleluia, song of sweetness

A.M.; E.H.; A.M.R.; Can.; Am.

Most Anglican books mark this hymn, “For the week before Septuagesima.” It is a translation of an old Latin hymn, *Alleluia, dulce carmen*, which had faded out of use by the eleventh century. Alleluia is the way the Greek New Testament spells the Hebrew Hallelujah, which is merely the two Hebrew words, *hallelu*, praise ye, and *Jah*, the Lord, “Praise ye the Lord.” It was the commonest response in Temple and Synagogue. First the choir sang a Psalm. Then the congregation answered, Hallelujah! Notice, for example, how in the Bible Psalms 115, 116 and 117 all end “Praise ye the Lord,” which in the Hebrew is simply “Hallelujah.” Psalms 146, 147, 148, 149 and 150 begin and end in the same way. In the Book of Maccabees we read: “The people went out from the presence of the King shouting Alleluia.”

The early Christians were so accustomed to this cry that they even regarded it as the song of Heaven. In the Book of Revelation we read: “I heard a great voice of much people in

Heaven saying, Alleluia. And the four and twenty Elders fell down and worshipped God, saying Alleluia. And I heard the voice of a great multitude, as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia, for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth.” So Alleluia became a prominent feature in all Christian worship. One of the earliest accounts that we have of a Christian Service is found in a Fayoum papyrus of the fourth century, and it says: “When Christians meet, they sing, Glory to the Father, Alleluia! and to the Son, Alleluia! and to the Holy Spirit, Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!” This became a kind of Christian watchword. Martyrs died shouting Alleluia. Jerome tells us that Alleluia was chanted triumphantly at Christian funerals as the corpse was carried to its grave. Sidonius Apollinaris, a fifth-century Bishop of Clermont in France, describes how the Christian haulers by the river side, as they towed the boats, used Alleluia as a chanty to make them heave together. When the Christian Britons in 429 charged the heathen invaders, they raised such a shout of Alleluia, that their enemies fled in panic, and the battle is called in history the Alleluia Victory. When Pope Gregory reported the success of his missionaries in England, he wrote: “Already Britain is beginning to ring with Alleluias.” In some Pacific islands today the native Christians are called by their heathen neighbours the Alleluia Folk, because they are so often heard singing Alleluia.

And this is as it should be. Christians should cultivate the habit of constantly “praising the Lord” for all the good gifts He has given. But the purpose of this hymn is not to urge us to sing Alleluia, but to tell us *not* to sing it. The forty days of Lent begin on Ash Wednesday; but in the Middle Ages the custom arose of starting a sort of semi-Lent on

Septuagesima. Lent is the season when the Church tries to make its members face the grim fact of Sin. It is comparatively easy to cultivate an attitude of cheerful thankfulness; but real penitence is a much more difficult spirit to acquire. So on Septuagesima the Church made several changes in its services, and among others it entirely dropped the singing of Alleluias. In 633 the eleventh canon of the Council of Toledo ordered that “in accordance with the universal custom of Christendom” Alleluia should not be used in any Spanish or Gaulish church from Septuagesima till Easter. So our hymn says:

Alleluia cannot always
Be our song while here below.
Alleluia our transgressions
Make us for awhile forego;
For the solemn time is coming,
When our tears for sin must flow.

But the dropping of a word would hardly be noticed by most of the congregation; so, to emphasize what was happening, some extraordinary ceremonies were invented. At Langres in France they kept an enormous whipping-top with the word Alleluia painted on it in golden letters, and at the close of the Evening Service on the Sunday before Septuagesima two choir-boys used to whip this down the aisle and out of the west door. At Toul they laid in a coffin a plank with the word Alleluia on it, and carried it out of the church with the full funeral ritual, and buried it in the cloisters, where it remained till it was disinterred on Easter Day. Elsewhere they kicked the word out of church painted on a football. This banishing of Alleluia was so firmly fixed in the

people's minds that not only in England, but also in France, Germany, Italy and Spain, the wood sorrel is popularly known as the alleluia, "because," wrote Turner in 1551, "it appeareth about Easter, when Alleluia is sung again."

Our hymn was written to be sung while these quaint Farewell-to-Alleluia rites were performed; and, when this ritual was dropped, the hymn also disappeared from the Service Books.

Why did the Church call such attention to the banishing of Alleluia? Because it wanted everyone to feel that, beautiful as the word may be on the lips of the Saints in bliss—

Alleluia is the anthem
Ever dear to choirs on high.
In the House of God abiding
Thus they sing continually—

sinner on earth cannot always be saying "Praise the Lord." There is something else far more urgent that they must learn to say, and that is "*Kyrie, eleison*," "Lord, have mercy." When we draw near to God, it is good to praise Him for what He has done, but we must also learn to ask pardon for much that we have left undone. These queer Septuagesima ceremonies were a striking preparation for Lent, an object lesson on the need for penitence. So, when Neale discovered this long-forgotten hymn, which does not appear in any manuscript later than the eleventh century, he felt that it was worth resurrecting, and nineteenth-century hymn-book editors agreed with him.

But we must not be content with periodically laying aside our Alleluias in order to ask for pardon. We look forward to a

time when there will no longer be any sins to confess or any
guilt to check our praises

In our Home beyond the sky
There to Thee for ever singing
Alleluia joyfully.

The tune to which the hymn is usually sung first appeared in
1782 in *An Essay on the Church Plain Chant* as a setting for
the *Tantum Ergo*, and ten years later in Webbe's *Collection of
Motets*. It may have been his own composition.

CHAPTER VI
JERUSALEM THE GOLDEN

Brief life is here our portion.
The world is very evil.
For Thee, oh dear, dear country.
Jerusalem the golden.

A.M.; E.H.; A.M.R.; S.P.; Meth.; Presb.; Cong.; Cong.P.; Bp.; R.C.; Irish;
Can.; Am.

Few hymns have had a stranger origin than these. About 1140 a monk in the Abbey of Cluny named Bernard (not of course his famous contemporary, St. Bernard of Clairvaux) wrote an immense poem of 2,991 lines, which he called *On Scorn of the World (De Contemptu Mundi)*. It was a bitter satire in which he scourged with great gusto all the corruptions of his age. Here, for example, is his picture of a Bishop returning from the chase: “His butler pours out Falernian wine. He reclines on luxurious cushions. Cut glass gleams and golden plate. Venison is brought; a fat fowl follows. More wine flows. At last he goes to bed. His servant turns back the silken quilt. This ball of flesh snores.” “This is an evil-smelling age,” wrote Bernard, “I call it not filthy, for it has become the

very incarnation of filth. A race that has cast off all restraint is galloping headlong to Hell.”

Church and State are alike rotten to the core. “Rome, thou art a bottomless whirlpool. The more thou receivest, the wider dost thou open thy jaws crying, ‘More! more!’ Gold is thy God, not Jesus.” The Bishops are worse than the people. “Those who are highest in position are often the foulest in sin. Any blackguard can become a Bishop. Men who ought to be hanged buy their mitres for gold.” His fellow-monks and the parochial clergy are just as fiercely castigated. But it is when he comes to speak of women that he really lets himself go: “Woman is a stench. Woman is a viper. Woman is Satan’s masterpiece, a wild beast, a seductive rottenness, vicious, perfidious, besmirching.” Raby says in his *Christian Latin Poetry*: “He attacks vice with a savage outspokenness which Juvenal never attempted and with a minuteness of description which knows neither reticence nor restraint.” The *Dictionary of Hymnology* remarks: “The character of the vices which he lashes makes it impossible to expect and undesirable to obtain a literal translation of the whole.” Even Professor Jackson of New York, who has recently published a scholarly edition of the poem, has been forced to give a list of the lines which decency compelled him to omit.

Two-thirds of the book are taken up with this revolting picture of depravity; but from time to time he turns aside to discuss the Future Life. His gloating over the tortures of Hell is sheer Sadism: “Black and penetrating is the scorching flame, and no water anywhere. The fires of earth are a cooling shade compared with those quenchless flames. Eyes, lips, breasts,

legs, all feed the blaze, yet never are they consumed. Sinners are nailed head downwards on crosses. Serpents sting them. Dragons breathe fire on them. Vultures gnaw eternally at their livers.” And so on, and so on, for six closely printed pages. Of this gruesome side of the poem our hymn-books retain no hint, except the lines:

The world is very evil.

The times are waxing late.

But from this dunghill of a book four jewels have been rescued. Against this murky background here and there Bernard painted little cameos of Heaven. These Neale translated into English verse, and parts of his version have found a place in almost every hymnal, generally divided into several separate hymns. Bernard made no attempt to be original. He kept closely to his New Testament, and simply reproduced hopes that he found there. He confessed that on the subject of Heaven we must be largely agnostic:

I know not, oh, I know not

What joys await us there.

And in so saying he was only re-echoing what Apostles had said before him. “It doth not yet appear what we shall be,” wrote St. John; and St. Paul agreed, “Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.” The unborn puppy in its mother’s womb cannot guess what life will be like when it frisks about in the sunshine. The grub wriggling in slime at the bottom of a pool has no idea what joys await it when it becomes a dragonfly. And no

human being can really picture what Heaven will be like.

Nevertheless St. John set down in the Book of Revelation a few things that he felt must be true; and Bernard reproduced these. The question is sometimes asked, Which is most desirable, town or country life? St. John voted for the town. Some Mystics have cried, "Leave me alone with the Alone." But St. John, the greatest of Mystics, said, "I long for a city. I want neighbours. Solitude implies self-centredness. Fellowship is Heaven." So Bernard too pictured Heaven as a city, a new Jerusalem. The earthly Jerusalem, once hailed by Prophets and Psalmists as a City of God, had proved a ghastly failure; but he hoped to find a new and finer Jerusalem in the Future Life, Jerusalem the Golden.

It would be a City Beautiful. The Jews often expressed beauty in terms of precious stones. The Book of Tobit had foretold that the earthly Jerusalem would be "builded with sapphires and emeralds and precious stones; its walls and battlements shall be pure gold. Its streets shall be paved with beryl and carbuncle." No one was expected to take this literally. It was Oriental poetry, not a town-planner's prospectus. St. John used the same imagery when he pictured his Heavenly Jerusalem, and Bernard followed in his steps:

With jaspers glow thy bulwarks;
Thy streets with emeralds blaze;
The sardius and the topaz
Unite in thee their rays.

All of which, when boiled down into sober prose, merely amounts to this, that every imaginable form of beauty will be united in Heaven.

He remembered too a text about “an innumerable company of Angels and the spirits of just men made perfect”; so he looked forward to a joyous, even an uproarious, Family Reunion of all the scattered branches of God’s family:

They stand, those halls of Sion,
All jubilant with song,
And bright with many an Angel,
And all the Martyr throng;

and he pictured Heaven as ringing with

The shout of them that triumph,
The song of them that feast.

But to New Testament Christians the most thrilling thought about Life after Death was that they would be with Christ. To be “absent from the body” is “to be present with the Lord.” So he added:

And He Whom now we trust in
Shall then be seen and known,
And they that know and see Him
Shall have Him for their own.

This thought recurs in almost every hymn about the Future. In one Watts even declared:

And Heaven without Thy Presence there
Would be a tiresome place.

But those who believe in a Future Life must prepare for it. “Let us labour to enter into that rest.”

Arise, arise, good Christian,
Let right to wrong succeed.
Let penitential sorrow
To heavenly gladness lead.

Our future will be largely coloured by how we live now.
Death will not make us Angels. Death is only a short tunnel
from one phase of life to another; and no train ever entered a
tunnel coal-trucks and came out Pullmans.

Strive, man, to win that glory.
Toil, man, to gain that light.
Send hope before to grasp it,
Till hope be lost in sight.

The verse, which in most books closes each section, “O sweet
and blessed country,” was not part of the original poem. It
was added with Neale’s full approval by the editors of *Ancient
and Modern*. The tunes used for the different portions all date
from the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER VII

THE HOLY NAME

*Jesu, the very thought of Thee.
Jesu, the very thought is sweet.
Jesu, Thou joy of loving hearts.*

A.M.; E.H.; S.P.; A.M.R.; Meth.; Presb.; Cong.; Cong.P.; Bp.; R.C.; Irish;
Can.; Am.

One fairly large group of hymns was inspired by the Name of Jesus. “Jesu, Name all names above,” wrote a ninth-century Eastern Abbot. “To the Name that brings salvation,” sang a fifteenth-century Dutchman. “How sweet the Name of Jesus sounds,” cried an English Evangelical. To understand these we must remember what the Name means. In Palestine in the first century there were many babies called Jesus. There were three in the High Priest’s family, who all became High Priests in time. Two of the most notorious local brigands bore the name of Jesus. In the New Testament we meet Jesus Justus, St. Paul’s fellow-worker in Rome, and Jesus, the father of Elymas the Sorcerer. The book Ecclesiasticus in the Apocrypha was written by Jesus, the son of Sirach. And all these babies were named after one of the great heroes of Jewish history.

Names often change their spelling as they pass from one language to another. John becomes Juan in Spanish, Hans in German, Giovanni in Italian; and Jesus was the Greek form of the Hebrew Joshua, the name of the leader under whom the Jews had conquered Palestine. For years they had wandered in the Wilderness, because the conquest of their inheritance seemed too hard a task. But, when they followed Joshua, every difficulty disappeared. The fortress of Jericho fell in seven days. The armies of the Canaanites were put to flight. And Joshua was able to give each family its own particular holding. No wonder they named their children after him. Moreover the meaning of the name added to its popularity. It meant “the Lord is Salvation.”

According to St. Matthew, before Mary’s Baby was born Joseph was told by an Angel in a dream: “Thou shall call His Name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins.” His very Name would sum up one side of the Child’s mission. By conquering sin He would win for His followers the blessings they had failed to gain. In the fifteenth century it began to be felt that a special day might well be observed to remind Christians what the Name of Jesus meant. Bishops in various parts of Belgium, Germany, England, Scotland and Spain ordered their dioceses to set apart a day for this purpose. The dates varied. Antwerp, which claimed to have originated the Festival, kept it on January 15th, Liège on January 31st, Meissen on March 15th, Salisbury on August 7th, certain Spanish dioceses on the last Sunday in October. In 1530 the Franciscans persuaded the Pope to authorize officially this Feast of the Most Holy Name to be kept in memory of “what Jesus is to us, what He has done for us, and what He is doing for mankind.” Rome has now transferred this to

the Second Sunday after Christmas, or, if there is no Second Sunday, to January 2nd; but the Anglican Calendar still retains the Salisbury date of August 7th.

When once the Feast was established, appropriate hymns were provided. “To the Name of our Salvation” was specially written for it, together with others which are not in our present books; but the most popular was the older *Jesu, dulcis memoria*, which was divided into three sections, one of which was sung at Vespers, one at Matins, and one at Lauds.

No voice can sing, no heart can frame,
Nor can the memory find,
A sweeter sound than Thy blest Name,
O Saviour of mankind.

Of this hymn *Ancient and Modern* gives no less than three translations, Caswall’s “Jesu, the very thought of Thee,” Neale’s “Jesu, the very thought is sweet,” and Ray Palmer’s “Jesu, Thou Joy of loving hearts.”

All these are fragments of a long Latin poem of forty-two verses (or in one version of fifty), which is much older than the Festival itself. The earliest manuscript that contains it is dated 1267, and there are several others of this century. In all these early copies the hymn is anonymous; but towards the end of the fourteenth century it began to be known as the *Jubilus* (i.e. Joy Song) of St. Bernard, the famous Abbot of Clairvaux. This guess seemed reasonable, for his sermons contain sentences extraordinarily like this hymn; for example, “If the thought of Thee is so sweet, how sweet will Thy presence be,” and “How good Thou art to the soul that seeks, but what to him who finds!” So for five

hundred years he was almost everywhere accepted as the writer.

In 1902 however an article by a Dom. Pothier in the *Revue du Chant Grégorien* announced that he had found this hymn in some manuscripts of the eleventh century. This would have meant that the hymn was known before Bernard was born. But now it has been suggested that in Pothier's article "11th century" may be a misprint for "14th," and in any case he does not disclose where his new manuscripts can be examined. But, even if we ignore this article, it does not follow that Bernard wrote the hymn. Its resemblance to his sermons may merely mean that he knew it and was fond of quoting it. There are other grounds for doubt. We have two hymns of which St. Bernard was undoubtedly the author; and their lumbering Latin bears no resemblance to the fluent, polished versification of *Jesu, dulcis memoria*. Moreover Mabillon, the Roman Catholic editor of St. Bernard's works, wrote in 1667: "We cannot be certain about the *Jubilus on the Name of Jesus*, hitherto ascribed to St. Bernard, for in a certain codex in the Abbey of Vaux de Cernay it is inscribed, *The Meditation of a certain Holy Virgin concerning the Love of Jesus*." So it may be the work of a woman, and, since the oldest manuscripts of the poem all come from English sources, perhaps she was an English nun.

Occasionally a hymn may be written in cold blood as a literary exercise, but all the best are the fruit of intense personal feeling. That is obviously the case with this one. Every line thrills with emotion. Arnold Bennett in his *Literary Taste* asks, "Why is a Classic a Classic?" Why for example does Shakespeare hold his supremacy year after year? The

vast majority of stolid ratepayers find him incredibly boring. His fame is maintained, Bennett insists, entirely by “the passionate few.” He repeats this phrase again and again. “It is by the passionate few that the renown of genius is kept alive from one generation to another.” The life of a cause depends on the intensity of emotion that it can create in its supporters. Shakespearian enthusiasts so revel in their Shakespeare that they cannot help inspiring an interest in others. And Christianity has been kept alive largely by “the passionate few,” who, like the writer of this hymn, dwell on the very Name of Jesus with intense devotion. This spirit appears again and again in the hymns of all ages. A much later hymnist cried:

O Jesus, Jesus, dearest Lord,
 Forgive me, if I say
For very love Thy precious Name
 A thousand times a day.

Another little hymn, often heard in Missions, begins:

Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!
 Sing aloud the Name,
Till it softly, sweetly,
 Sets all hearts aflame.

One of the old martyr-legends states that, when the breast of St. Ignatius was torn open by a bear, onlookers saw printed on his heart the Name of Jesus, an exaggerated way of asserting that love for Jesus had been the inspiring motive of his life. And the author of *Jesu, dulcis memoria* was plainly one of these passionate lovers, turning over and over in his or her mind what the word Saviour means:

To those who fall how kind Thou art!
How good to those who seek!
But what to those who find? Ah this
Nor tongue nor pen can show.

The last line of this verse however contains a mistranslation.
The Latin clearly declares:

The love of Jesus what it is
None but His lovers know,

a reading which the Roman Catholic book retains. But Victorian prudery shrank from calling ourselves lovers of Jesus; so the line was altered to “None but His loved ones know.” This however entirely spoils the meaning. We all hope we are loved; but only those who return Christ’s love know what that love can do for them.

The thought behind the lines,

Who eat Thee hunger still;
Who drink of Thee still feel a void
Which naught but Thou can fill,

is borrowed from Ecclesiasticus, where the Voice of Wisdom cries: “They that eat me shall still be hungry, and they that drink me shall yet thirst.” No real student ever reaches a point at which he gets “fed up” and wants to learn no more. The more he knows, the keener his appetite for knowledge grows. In the same way, says our hymnist, the more intimate we get with Christ, the more ardently we long to know Him better.

In the Office for the Visitation of the Sick the clergyman is bidden to take the sick man by the hand and say: “Almighty God make thee know and feel that there is none other name under heaven given to man in whom and through whom thou mayest receive health and salvation, but only the Name of our Lord, Jesus Christ.” That is the message of this hymn. It throws light on the Prayer-book petition: “Graft in our hearts the love of Thy Name.” But perhaps the best comment is four words added at the end of an old Lambeth manuscript of the hymn, “*Jesu, esto mihi Jesus,*” “Jesu, be to me all that the Name Jesus implies.”

CHAPTER VIII

THE ADVENT OHS

O come, O come, Emmanuel

A.M.; E.H.; S.P.; A.M.R.; Meth.; Presb.; Cong.; Cong.P.; R.C.; Irish; Am.

This Advent hymn owes its popularity largely to its splendid tune, which sounds so magnificently medieval, though it cannot be traced farther back than *The Hymnal Noted*, which was published in 1856. It was probably composed by Thomas Helmore, the editor, out of memories of some plainsong Kyries. But, when we look at the words, we may well wonder how many singers have any idea, for example, why our Lord is addressed by such odd titles as Rod of Jesse or Key of David. Few hymns are sung with less understanding. Even choirmasters hedge when asked what Adonai means.

The words have a long story behind them. Before our Services were simplified at the Reformation, it was the custom to sing before and after the Magnificat a short prayer called the Antiphon, which struck the keynote of the season. For the seven days before Christmas the original Antiphon was merely a long-drawn-out “Oh!” meant to express

yearning. When few of the congregation could read, this was at any rate something in which everyone could join.

But in time this “Great Advent Oh,” as it was called, was felt to be slightly ridiculous; so a short Latin prayer, which changed daily, was tacked on to it. This accounts for the entry *O Sapientia*, which appears in the Church Calendar on December 16th. It indicated that the Antiphon for that day was the one beginning, *O Sapientia*: “O Wisdom, Who camest from the mouth of the Most High, . . . teach us the way of discretion.” This entry was retained after the Reformation, because certain rents were due on *O Sapientia*, and it was convenient to preserve a record of its date.

A third stage came in the hymn’s history when some unknown medieval poet took five of these Antiphons and wove them into a Latin hymn. But he added something to them. He closed each verse with a triumphant refrain, declaring that the prayer would be answered:

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

Different hymnals have adopted different translations. That in *Ancient and Modern* is based on Neale’s in his *Medieval Hymns*; that in *The English Hymnal* was made by Canon Lacey.

The word “Israel” is sometimes misunderstood. Choir-boys have been known to object to this hymn on the ground that “We ain’t Jews.” But the writer was not thinking of what St. Paul called “Israel after the flesh.” He remembered the Apostle’s teaching that the true Israel today is the Church.

The old Israel forfeited its privileges by crucifying its Messiah, and God had Chosen His Church to be the New Israel. “Israel” now means the Christian Church, “the blessed Company of all faithful people.”

The hymn is steeped from beginning to end in Bible phraseology. Hence the quite extraordinary titles under which our Lord is invoked. “Emmanuel” is familiar to everyone through the Christmas carols. But how many people remember the origin of that name? The Assyrian Empire was threatening the tiny Kingdom of Judah, and Hezekiah, its King, was seeking safety in dangerous foreign alliances; and Isaiah rebuked his lack of faith by telling how a girl had chosen for her unborn baby the name Emmanuel, which meant “God with us.” This fact the King was forgetting. God was a stronger Ally than any foreign potentate.

But to Christians later this name Emmanuel, with its meaning “God with us,” seemed to sum up just what they believed about Jesus. It appeared to them that the Prophet must have been thinking of the coming of Christ, God taking our nature upon Him, God coming to share our life. And they adopted the name as one of the titles of their Master. So the hymn proclaims: “Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come.”

The next title, “Rod of Jesse,” was also borrowed from Isaiah, who had prophesied: “A rod shall come out of the stem of Jesse, and He shall smite the earth.” Jesse was the father of David. The Prophet believed that from the degenerate stump of the Jewish Royal Family a shoot would spring, a Messiah, who would overthrow all evil. And again Christians had no

doubt that this prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus, and they prayed: “Rod of Jesse, free us from Satan’s tyranny.”

The title “Dayspring” comes from the Benedictus, the Song of Zacharias, the father of the Baptist: “The Dayspring from on High hath visited us to give light to them that sit in darkness.” “Dayspring” is the picturesque Old English name for the Dawn, the first little flush of rosy light, which proclaims that Day is at hand. When the dayspring appears, everyone knows that darkness will soon be gone. So the Antiphon-writer seized on this lovely name for Christ, and prayed: “O Dayspring, banish darkness from our lives and from the whole world. Cheer us and disperse our gloom.”

The fourth title, “Key of David,” is again taken from Isaiah. He was denouncing Shebna, the King’s Chamberlain, and prophesying that he would soon be dismissed, and his office given to another, on whose shoulder “the key of the House of David” would be laid, meaning that he would have the right to open every door in the Palace. It may seem rather far-fetched to apply this title to our Lord, but the Book of Revelation had already done so: “These things saith He that hath the Key of David, that Openeth and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth.” So the Latin Antiphon prayed: “Come, Key of David, unlock the gate to what is high and lock the gate to what is low.” A modern poet has written:

To every man there openeth a High Way and a Low,
And every man decideth which way his Soul shall go.

But sometimes the door of temptation stands enticingly open, and the door to amendment seems inexorably closed. It is comforting to think of Christ as the Key, Who will padlock

the one and throw open the other. So our English version runs:

Make safe the way that leads on high,
And close the path to misery.

In the last verse the Antiphon prayed: “O Adonai, Who appearedst to Moses in a flame and gavest him the Law on Sinai, come and deliver us.” The *English Hymnal and Songs of Praise* retain this mysterious name, but most other hymnals substitute “Lord of Might.” *Adonai* is the Hebrew word for “Lord”; and, since Jews consider the name Jehovah too sacred to be spoken aloud, whenever it occurs in the Old Testament the reader in the synagogue says *Adonai*. The name came specially to mean the God of Sinai; and the Antiphon boldly identifies the Carpenter of Nazareth with the awe-inspiring Jehovah, Who

In ancient times didst give the Law
In cloud and majesty and awe.

These five titles form a short Creed, showing what medieval Christians believed about Christ. But now comes the main problem, the crux of the whole hymn: What did they mean when they kept on crying, “Come, O come”? Neale made his translation a hundred years ago, and in his days Advent always proclaimed a spectacular Second Coming of Christ in the clouds. This thought was so fixed in his mind, that it led him to mistranslate one word in the refrain. The Latin does not say “shall *come* to thee,” but *nascetur pro te*, “shall *be born* for thee.” The writer was thinking not of Doomsday but of Christmas. The original purpose of Advent was to prepare for Christmas as Lent prepares for Easter.

This however still leaves the “Come” unexplained. Christ was born centuries ago. Why should we rejoice at the thought that He “*shall* be born”? The seventeenth-century Mystic, Angelus Silesius, gives the clue:

Should Christ be born a thousand times anew,
Despair, O man, *unless He's born in you.*

In one Christmas hymn we pray:

O be Thou *born within our hearts,*
Most Holy Child Divine.

And Bishop Phillips Brooks has developed this thought:

O Holy Child of Bethlehem,
Descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sin, and enter in:
Be born in us today.

We hear the Christmas Angels
The great, glad tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us,
Our Lord Immanuel.

“Advent” means Coming. But three Comings of Christ are mentioned in the New Testament, past, present and future. He has come in the manger. That is past. He will come as Judge. That is future. But there is also a present Coming that is gloriously true. He comes today, every day. When He said, “I will come to you,” He didn’t mean at the Judgement. He meant, “Whenever you need Me, whenever you call.” “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man open the door, I will come in.” Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

CHAPTER IX
A PSALM OF DELIVERANCE
Through all the changing scenes of life

A.M.; E.H.; A.M.R.; S.P.; Meth.; Bp.; Cong.; Cong.P.;
Irish; Can.

Hymn-singing did not win its way without opposition. We have already seen that in the third century a Bishop of Antioch had forbidden the use of hymns and ordered that nothing should be sung in church but the Old Testament Psalms. In Spain the prejudice against hymns lasted till the seventh century. In 561 the 12th Canon of the Council of Braga ran: "Outside the Psalms of the Old and New Testaments no poetical composition shall be sung in church"; and it was not till 633 that this was rescinded by the Council of Toledo. At the Reformation the controversy broke out afresh. Luther loved hymns. He himself wrote thirty-seven, and his followers some hundreds more. But Calvin saw danger in this. If every enthusiastic person who felt a whiff of pious emotion began to write verses and set them to music, the most extraordinary heresies might sing their way into the people's minds. The only concession he would make was to allow the Bible Psalms to be turned into verse. So, wherever

his influence was strong, as it was in early years in Switzerland, France, Holland, Scotland and England, Metrical Psalters were for years the only hymn-books permitted. In Scotland hymns remained almost unknown till 1852.

The first to provide a Metrical Psalter for England was Thomas Sternhold, an official at the Court of Edward VI. He published a small collection of Psalms in 1548, “a few crumbs which I have picked from under my Lord’s table”; and this in 1562 John Hopkins, a Suffolk Rector, enlarged to contain all the hundred and fifty. This *Old Version*, as it was called, reigned without a rival for 134 years, and remained in use in some village churches well into the nineteenth century. One of its Psalms is known everywhere, the stately Old Hundredth. But much of the versification was very rugged. When the seventeenth century came, and educated congregations had learnt to admire the poems of Herrick and Dryden, they could hardly be expected to sing:

But there He whelmed then
The proud King Pharao
With his huge hoast of men
And charets eke also.

So in 1690 two Irishmen, Nahum Tate, the Poet Laureate, and Nicholas Brady, Chaplain to the King, published a *New Version*, which William III “permitted to be used in all such churches as shall think fit to receive it.” The opening words of the Thirty-fourth Psalm will show the difference in these versions. The Bible text ran: “I will bless the Lord at all times. His praise shall continually be in my mouth. O magnify

the Lord with me. Let us exalt His Name together.”

Sternhold turned this into:

I will give laud and honour both
Unto my Lord alwaies;
And eke my mouth for evermore
Shall speak unto His praise.
Therefore see that ye magnifie
With me the Living Lord;
And let us now exalt His Name
Together with one accord.

In the *New Version* this became:

Through all the changing scenes of life,
In trouble and in joy,
The praises of my God shall still
My heart and tongue employ.
O magnify the Lord with me!
With me exalt His Name!

Notice how the phrase “at all times” is expanded into “Through all the changing scenes of life, in trouble and in joy” to bring out its full meaning.

The mention of the Angel hosts encamping round the dwellings of the just looks back to two Bible stories. Jacob after years of exile was returning to his own land. With a long straggling caravan of flocks and women and children he reached the frontier of Edom, where his brother Esau lived. Years before, Jacob had wronged Esau and swindled him out of his birthright, and Esau had sworn to kill him. So, when Jacob heard that his brother was marching to meet him with

four hundred armed men, he was terrified. But then he saw in a vision “the angels of God,” and “he said, This is God’s host, and he called the name of that place Mahanaim,” which means the Two Camps. He knew now that there were two camps on that spot, his own, full of helpless women and defenceless cattle, and another, shadowy but just as real, the camp of God’s soldiers, keeping guard.

In a later story the armies of Syria raided Israel to capture the Prophet Elisha. By night they surrounded the little town of Dothan where he lived. Early in the morning the lad who waited on him saw them and rushed back in terror: “Alas, my master! how shall we do?” But the Prophet answered calmly: “Fear not. They that be with us are more than they that be with them.” And he prayed that the lad’s eyes might be opened. “And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw; and behold the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.”

The hosts of God encamp around
The dwellings of the just.
Deliverance He affords to all
Who on His succour trust.

If we glance through the complete Psalm in the Bible version, we see that *deliverance* is its leading thought: “I sought the Lord and He *delivered* me from all my fears”; “The Angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him and *delivereth* them”; “The righteous cry and the Lord *delivereth* them out of all their troubles”; “Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord *delivereth* him out of all.”

The Hebrew Psalter was the Jewish *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, a collection of old and recent Psalms, gathered for use in the new Temple, which the exiles built after their return from Babylon. Things looked pretty grim in those days. The people had set out full of hope. “When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, then were we like unto them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter and our tongue with joy.” But, when they arrived, they found the city a heap of burnt-out rubble overgrown with briars. The walls had been destroyed. Wild beasts and desert robbers prowled the streets at night. The neighbouring tribes resented the Return and did their utmost to make the rebuilding of the city impossible. Some of the exiles began to regret that they had left Babylon. But Psalms like this Thirty-fourth kept the faith of the others alive: “Great are the troubles of the Righteous, but the Lord delivereth him out of all. The Lord delivereth the souls of His servants; all they that put their trust in Him shall not be destitute.”

Deliverance He affords to all
Who on His succour trust.

Even when a start was made in rebuilding the walls, and a young surveyor was pegging out where the new walls were to go, the Prophet Zechariah heard a Voice urging him, “Run, speak to this young man, saying, Jerusalem shall be inhabited without walls.” Walls showed lack of faith in God. “I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about.”

Then the Psalm gives the famous invitation, made familiar by Attwood’s anthem, “O taste and see how gracious the

Lord is. Blessed is the man that trusteth in Him.” This the hymn paraphrases as:

O make but trial of His love.
Experience will decide
How blest are they, and only they,
Who in His truth confide.

Experience teaches. Once we have tasted how good a peach is, we will not refuse another. The hymn bids us apply the same test to Religion. Give it a trial. “Experience will decide.” This is what our ancestors used to call Experimental Religion, the Religion of those who have tested Christianity and found that it works.

The last verse declares:

Fear Him, ye Saints, and you will then
Have nothing else to fear.

Tate and Brady evidently remembered what had been said of John Knox: “He feared man so little, because he feared God so much.” When everything else that Donald Hankey did or said is forgotten, he will be remembered for one sentence which he wrote: “True Religion is betting your life that there is a God,” staking all that you have, even life itself, on that belief. That conviction has been the foundation of the noblest lives the world has yet seen, the conviction that God is always there and always ready to help. Florence Nightingale asked that no inscription should be put on her tomb but “I believe in God.” Faith is not closing one’s eyes to facts, but opening one’s eyes to the wonder of them.

Make you His service your delight.

Your wants shall be His care.

CHAPTER X

A WINCHESTER COLLEGE HYMN

Awake, my soul, and with the sun

A.M.; E.H.; S.P.; A.M.R.; Meth.; Presb.; Cong.; Cong.P.; Bp.; Irish; Can.; Am.

During the seventeenth century a number of good English poets were writing religious verse, Donne, Crashaw, Traherne, Vaughan, Herbert and Herrick, to say nothing of more homely rhymers like Baxter and Bunyan; but, so tight was the grip of the Metrical Psalms on all forms of public worship, that no one ever thought of setting these words to music or singing them. They were admired as charming poems, but it was not till quite recent years that any of them have been admitted to our hymnals. Of the thousands of English hymns now in common use not one per cent. is earlier than the eighteenth century.

The first person to write English verses with the deliberate intention that they should be sung as hymns was probably Thomas Ken. As an orphan he had been brought up by his brother-in-law, Izaak Walton the fisherman, and sent to Winchester College, where his name can still be seen carved in the cloisters. Later he returned to the city as Chaplain to the

Bishop and Prebendary of the Cathedral. Macaulay wrote of him: “His moral character, when impartially reviewed, seems to approach as near as human infirmity permits to the ideal perfection of Christian virtue.” One piece of work he did, before he left Winchester to become Bishop of Bath and Wells, was to write for the college boys his well-known Morning and Evening Hymns, “Awake, my soul” and “Glory to Thee, my God, this night,” adding rather strangely a Hymn for Midnight, when one would expect all healthy schoolboys to be fast asleep.

In 1674 he published a short *Manual of Prayers for Scholars of Winchester College*. His hymns must be older than this, for he says, “Be sure to sing the Morning and Evening Hymns in your chamber devoutly”; but he does not print the words, evidently taking for granted that the boys are familiar with them; so he must have distributed them as a leaflet. They were never used in the school prayers, which were always in Latin. They were written to be sung “in your chamber.” To us it may seem hard to picture a small boy tumbling out of bed in a crowded dormitory and starting to sing a hymn, but Ken had been a Winchester boy himself; so he must have known that this was not wildly incredible.

In later editions of the *Manual* Ken inserted the words, and there they remained for more than a century, unknown to any but Winchester boys, till 1782, when a printer issued an edition of the Prayer-book with these hymns added at the end of the Metrical Psalms. They then rapidly came into use throughout the English-speaking world. George Eliot pictures Adam Bede singing, “Awake, my soul,” as he strode across the fields.

Pundits on hymn-singing insist that every hymn must be addressed to God, and that there must be no “I” or “me” in it, nothing but “we” and “us.” Ken breaks both these rules. The first part of “Awake, my soul” is addressed entirely to ourselves—“Wake up! Shake off dull sloth! Make up for the time you lost yesterday!” But “Onward, Christian soldiers” and “Fight the good fight” and many other hymns exhorting ourselves are heard in all our churches. And the closing verses amply atone for any shortcomings in this respect, for they are entirely prayer. As to the criticism that it is all about “me,” we must remember that it was written to be part of a schoolboy’s private prayers.

And what a splendid challenge it is! What a fine ideal it maps out for the day’s work! Wake up! Winchester scholars rose at five, winter and summer. Don’t go mooching about half asleep! Your day’s programme, your “daily stage of duty,” is waiting to be done. “Shake off dull sloth.” If this needs an effort, regard it as your “morning sacrifice” to God. “Redeem” (the *Oxford Dictionary* defines this word as “Recover by expenditure of effort”) the hours you have wasted. If yesterday was a failure, make a real effort today to catch up with your arrears. Then comes some startling advice. “And live this day as if thy last.” Live as if you had no tomorrow. Banish that fatal feeling, “Oh, there’s plenty of time!” If something is waiting to be done, do it before bedtime. Ken’s biographer tells us: “For many years he travelled with his shroud in his portmanteau” to remind him that he never knew when he might need it.

“Improve thy talent.” The reference here is to our Lord’s Parable of the Talents. God entrusts to everyone some

special gift to be developed for Him. Otherwise, when “the Great Day” of reckoning comes, we shall be disgraced as unfaithful servants. That phrase, “the Great Day,” was constantly in Ken’s thoughts. The prayer that he wrote to be inscribed on his tomb looks forward to “a perfect consummation at the Great Day, of which God keep me always mindful.”

As the hymn goes on we urge ourselves to keep our converse (i.e. our conversation) sincere—there is nothing more soul-destroying than insincerity—and our “conscience as the noonday clear.” Ken practised what he preached. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* says of him: “He lives in History mainly as a man of invincible fidelity to conscience. When Chaplain to Princess Mary at The Hague, he was dismissed for rebuking William of Orange for the immorality of his Court. When Charles II visited Winchester, he refused to admit Nell Gwyn, the King’s mistress, to his house. This so impressed the King, that, when the Bishopric of Bath and Wells became vacant, he said, ‘Give it to the little black fellow, who refused a lodging to poor Nellie.’” Later he was one of the Seven Bishops imprisoned in the Tower for refusing to read from the pulpit James II’s Declaration of Indulgence. Yet, when James was deposed, he resigned his bishopric, because he could not conscientiously take an oath of allegiance to one King, while another, to whom he had sworn allegiance, was alive. He never hesitated to obey his conscience, even when it got him into trouble. Belief in an “All-seeing God” watching his “secret thoughts” took away all fear of men.

The hymn, as Ken wrote it, had fourteen verses, which is too long for modern taste, so most books drop six of them, and divide the remaining eight into two parts. The omitted verses deal largely with the Angels, who were very real to Ken.

I wake, I wake, ye Heavenly Choir.
May your devotion me inspire,
That I like you my age may spend,
Like you may on my God attend.

May I like you in God delight,
Have all day long my God in sight,
Perform like you my Master's will.

The hymn began with a strong resolve to make the coming day a good one. It ends with a prayer for help to turn these good intentions into fact. Thousands of Christians incorporate the last verse in their daily morning prayers:

Direct, control, suggest this day
All I design or do or say,
That all my powers with all their might
In Thy sole glory may unite.

The whole Bible is a book of God-guided lives. "The Lord said unto Abraham, Get thee out to a land I will show thee." "The Lord said unto Moses, I will send thee unto Pharaoh." "Then said Amos, No prophet am I nor prophet's son, but the Lord said unto me, Go, speak to My people Israel." It is the same in the New Testament. "While I prayed," said St. Paul, "the Lord said unto me. Get thee out of Jerusalem." And Ken knew that the Prayer-book implies that our lives today ought also to be God-guided. We pray that all our

doings may be ordered by God's governance, that by God's holy inspiration we may think those things that be good, and "by Thy merciful guiding" may perform the same. Oliver Cromwell wrote to the girl who married his son Richard. "I desire you both to make it your business above all things to seek the Lord and be listening for His Voice; for He will be speaking in your ear, if you attend thereto."

The closing Doxology must be the best-known verse in English literature. The custom of adding a Gloria to each Psalm suggested that every hymn also should end with a stanza of praise. Dozens of Doxologies were written, but the most widely used is Ken's "Praise God from Whom all blessings flow." It is often sung alone, and it has been tacked on to innumerable long-metre hymns; but its original place was at the end of his Morning and Evening Hymns.

A contemporary tells us that Ken used to sing his Morning Hymn every day "before he put on his cloathes," accompanying himself on his lute; but we are not told what tune he used. We know that in 1785 the girls in the Westminster Bridge Road Orphanage sang it to *Uffingham* (A.M. 658), for in that year F. H. Barthélemon, their singing-master, composed a new tune for it, which has been named *Morning Light*. In the nineteenth century it was often sung to *Tallis' Canon or Commandments*, but the newer books (e.g. *Ancient and Modern Revised, English Hymnal, Songs of Praise*, the Methodist, Presbyterian, Congregational and Baptist books, the Irish, Canadian and American books) have now returned to the tune which the French fiddler, Barthélemon, wrote for his Lambeth orphans.

CHAPTER XI

BEYOND THE SWELLING FLOOD

There is a land of pure delight

A.M.; E.H.; S.P.; A.M.R.; Meth.; Presb.; Cong.; Cong.P.; Bp.; Can.; Irish;
Am.

A few of Tate and Brady's Psalms the Church will never let die. But many were appalling twaddle. Here for example is a sample from their version of the *Venite*:

Let not your hardened hearts renew
Your fathers' crimes and judgements too,
Nor here provoke my wrath as they
In desert plains of Meriba.

It was a young Nonconformist, Isaac Watts, who freed England from this kind of drivel. Many portraits of him exist as a venerable septuagenarian in a full-bottomed wig and the robes of a Doctor of Divinity, the erudite scholar who produced the standard handbook on Logic, the speculative theologian who, in the opinion of his biographer, "wasted his declining years in trying to prove the unprovable and explain the inexplicable," a reference to the part he played in the Trinitarian controversy. But most of his hymns were written

when he was still “that impudent young Isaac,” who was throwing down a challenge with youthful audacity to all the accepted conventions of public worship. He dared to remind his fellow-Dissenters that David was not a Christian, that some of the Psalms are “almost opposite to the spirit of the Gospel,” and to ask whether they really felt happy, when singing with Tate and Brady:

Thrice blest who, with just rage possest
And deaf to all the parents’ moans,
Shall snatch thy infants from the breast
And dash their heads against the stones.

He asserted again and again that Christians ought to sing Christian sentiments, “not the thoughts of David and Asaph.”

Dr. Phillips writes in his *Hymnody Past and Present*: “For him it was reserved to overthrow the tyranny of Psalmody by the practical method of putting something better in its place. It is hardly an exaggeration to compare him with St. Ambrose. Like him he secured the triumph of Hymnody, made important and imperishable contributions to it, and permanently influenced the form it was to assume in the generations that followed.” He had several heavy handicaps to overcome. In most chapels many members could not read; so the custom had arisen of “lining,” giving out one line at a time, which the congregation then sang. This meant that every line had to be a complete sentence. Moreover, since the only music available was the familiar Psalm tunes, he had to adapt all his hymns to their metres. The majority of these were in what is now called Common Metre, the metre of the old-time ballads. He used this for “There is a land of pure

delight.” Next in popularity came Long Metre, the metre of the Latin Office Hymns and of the Old Hundredth. This he chose for “When I survey” and “Jesus shall reign.” Then came Short Metre, in which twelve syllables are followed by fourteen as in “Come ye that love the Lord.” This was known as Poulter’s Metre, because poulterers sometimes gave twelve to the dozen and sometimes fourteen. Almost all his hymns conform to one of these styles, though occasionally a German tune gave him a chance of breaking out into something less conventional.

But in spite of these restrictions we recognize that now we have reached a real poet. Neither Brady nor Tate could ever have written:

Sweet fields beyond the swelling flood
Stand dressed in living green.

Even when he plunged into contemporary politics he kept his poetic touch:

Let Caesar’s dues be ever paid
To Caesar and his throne;
But consciences and souls were made
To be the Lord’s alone.

In 1707 he published his *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, the first modern English hymn-book to secure any general use. It contained 210 hymns, all written by himself. We will examine three of them. One terror which man has largely outgrown is the fear of death. It is hard to realize what a bugbear this was to our forefathers. They loved to quote Bildad the Shuhite, who called Death “the King of Terrors.” Milton

wrote of “Grim Death, that grisly terror.” Even bluff Dr. Johnson, a typical Englishman, who in his sober, eighteenth-century way was deeply religious, hated his birthdays, because they reminded him that he was one step nearer the grave. “Death,” he said, “is a terrible thing. The man who says he is not afraid of it lies.” People were extraordinarily morbid about this. The path to every church was lined with tombs inscribed:

As I am now, so you will be.
Therefore prepare to follow me.

Even at Christmas carol-singers wailed, “Remember, O thou man, thou must die, thou must die.”

Watts resolved to do his best to banish this unwholesome and unchristian obsession. One day, as he stood in Southampton Docks amid the hustle and noise of what even in those days was a great seaport, he looked across the Southampton Water and saw on the other side the peaceful meadows round Marchwood with the New Forest in the background, where

Sweet fields beyond the swelling flood
Stand dressed in living green,

and he had an inspiration. His mind was steeped in Bible imagery. He remembered how the Israelites after forty years wandering at last saw the Promised Land on the other side of Jordan:

So to the Jews old Canaan stood,
While Jordan rolled between.

He remembered how Moses was allowed to climb Mount Pisgah and “view the landscape o’er.” And he went home and wrote a hymn, in which he made the Southampton Water and the River Jordan a parable of Death, but a parable from which all the usual horrors had disappeared.

He headed it, “A Prospect of Heaven makes Death easy.” His message is “Fix your thoughts on what lies on the other side.” He avoids the apocalyptic imagery in which some hymns had revelled. Unlike Bernard of Cluny he sees no streets paved with emeralds or walls of amethyst. The quiet Hampshire meadows are his idea of Heaven. To pass from this life to the next is like passing from the hurly-burly of Southampton Docks to the green fields across the creek:

Death like a narrow sea divides
This heavenly land from ours.

Could we only see what lies before us “with unbeckoned eyes,”

Not Jordan’s stream, nor death’s cold flood
Should fright us from the shore.

It was a wholesome message and one specially needed in the age in which he wrote.

There have been times when Christians became too otherworldly. They thought so much about the Life to Come that they neglected present duties. They justified Karl Marx’ Charge that Religion was dope. But “I believe in the Life Everlasting” is the crowning glory of our creed. Death is as

natural as birth. There is nothing alarming about it. “The souls of the faithful, after they are delivered from the burden of the flesh, are in joy and felicity.” In the midst of death we are in Life.

One small point may be noted. Watts has been blamed for making “sea” rhyme with “away.” But pronunciation changes. In Watts’ day “ea” was pronounced “ay.” Cowper wrote:

God moves in a mysterious way.
He plants His footsteps in the sea.

Critics must remember this peculiarity of our language, before they carp at our hymnists as bad rhymesters.

This is one of the hymns that has never been unquestionably wedded to a tune. The *Ancient and Modern* tune *Beulah* has been adopted by the Methodist, Baptist, and Irish books. The *English Hymnal’s Mendip*, a Somerset folk tune, has been borrowed by the Presbyterians and Congregationalists. Almost every other book makes a different choice. *Salisbury*, *Brunswick*, *Beatitudo*, *Byzantium* and *Horsley* have all been selected. The American book rather happily links these words with *Capel*.

CHAPTER XII

THE WONDROUS CROSS

When I survey the wondrous Cross

A.M.; E.H.; S.P.; A.M.R.; Meth.; Presb.; Cong.; Cong.P.; Bp.; Irish; Can.;
Am.

Watts wrote altogether about six hundred hymns, and of these a surprising number remain in common use. Everyone knows “Jesus shall reign,” “Come let us join our cheerful songs,” “How bright these glorious spirits shine,” and “This is the day the Lord hath made”; but none of them has moved men’s hearts more deeply than “When I survey.” The *Dictionary of Hymnology* calls it “one of the four which stand at the head of all hymns in the English language.” Matthew Arnold went farther, and declared it to be “the finest hymn ever written.” It is referred to again and again in secular literature. Arnold Bennett in one of his Five Town stories pictures his heroine saying “It would be worth anything on earth to be able to sing those words and mean them.”

The words are so familiar that it needs a moment’s thought before we can sing them with understanding. They assume that we are surveying something. The dictionary definition of “survey” is “to examine with a scrutinizing eye, to inspect

attentively.” What we are surveying is a cross, the cruellest method of execution ever invented. In England, if anyone has to be executed, he is hanged, in France he is guillotined, in America he is electrocuted. In each case it is a swift and almost painless death. But the barbarous Phoenicians invented crucifixion. Instead of killing their prisoners quickly, they nailed them to a cross. The wounds in hands and feet were not serious enough to kill; but they were unthinkably painful. And there the unfortunate victims remained for hours and sometimes for days, until they died of exhaustion. Rome borrowed this fiendish torture from the merciless East, but never used it for a Roman. She reserved it for the lowest class of criminals and slaves.

We have seen how by the time of Fortunatus the Cross had become for Christians the badge of their Religion:

O Tree of beauty, Tree of light!
O Tree with royal purple dight!

Eleven hundred years later, to Watts, an English Nonconformist, the Cross was still the central feature of his Religion. For the Man on the Cross that we are surveying is no convicted criminal. The verdict at His trial was, “I find no fault in Him.” He hangs there because a cowardly judge yielded to the clamour of a mob. Watts in his first version of the hymn called attention to Christ’s youth. He was only about thirty when He died, a comparatively young Man, Who might have hoped for another forty years of useful life. In early copies the second line of the first verse ran, “Where the young Prince of Glory died”; but in later editions Watts altered this into, “On which the Prince.”

The phrase, “the Prince of Glory,” was suggested by the Twenty-fourth Psalm: “Who is the King of Glory? It is the Lord, strong and mighty. He is the King of Glory.” If “the King of Glory” is God, then “the Prince of Glory” must be the Son of God. The Prince of Glory crucified at the Place of Skulls! If that be true, then Watts chose the only possible adjective when he called that Cross “wondrous.” Olive Schreiner tells in one of her books how, when she first heard the story of the Cross, she raced home breathless to tell her mother, crying, “Mummie, isn’t it wonderful!” We stolid Britishers need to recapture the sense of Wonder. In Egypt a long-buried list of *Sayings of the Lord Jesus* has been discovered. Whether they are authentic, no one can say. But one of them runs: “Wonder at the things before you, for wonder is the first step towards knowledge.” This is certainly true of Secular Knowledge. Astronomy was born, when men began to think:

Twinkle, twinkle, little star;
How I wonder what you are!

And in Religion it is even more essential. In the presence of the Cross the only reasonable attitude is that of Bishop Walsham How’s children’s hymn:

It is a thing most wonderful,
Almost too wonderful to be,
That God’s own Son came down from Heaven,
And died to save a child like me.

St. Theresa, one of the most influential women who ever lived, was for years an entirely undistinguished nun, doing her religious duties punctually in a humdrum,

conventional way, till one day, as she entered the chapel, her eyes chanced to fall on the crucifix, the same crucifix that had confronted her thousands of times before. But this time she really saw it, and took in the wonder of it, and falling on her knees, she dedicated herself, holding absolutely nothing back, to the service of Christ; and before long she had reformed all the convents of her Order, and established a new standard of devotion for most of the nunneries of Europe.

Watts printed this hymn in the section of his book headed, "For the Lord's Supper." This Sacrament, which the Catechism says was ordained "for the continual remembrance of the sacrifice of the death of Christ and of the benefits which we receive thereby," is a call to all who come to it to "survey the wondrous Cross." We do not know what form of words Watts may have used at the Administration of the Lord's Supper in his Congregational Chapel; but it was probably not unlike that laid down in the Anglican Prayer-book: "Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for thee." "Drink this in remembrance that Christ's Blood was shed for thee." The final verse of another of his hymns voices the feeling that he would hope to inspire:

Where reason fails with all her powers,
There faith prevails, and love adores.

Then arises the question, "What shall I give unto the Lord for all the benefits that He hath done unto me?" Watts suggests three offerings that should be laid at the foot of the Cross. First, our pride. "I pour contempt on all my pride." A young officer did a plucky deed, but was rather inclined to brag about it. His colonel cured him very gently. "Not bad,"

he said, “it reminds me of things I saw in the First War.” Then he described some exploits which threw what the youngster had done entirely into the shade, and made him ashamed of his boasting. His own deed seemed insignificant compared with the other stories. He felt like the woman in a clever advertisement who gazed with disgust at her washing, when she saw it on the line side by side with that of a laundress who used something that really did shift the dirt. That was how Watts felt, when he set his small acts of self-sacrifice side by side with the Cross. “Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast.” This feeling is very salutary. The old theologians taught that Pride is the deadliest of the Deadly Sins; for, when we get too pleased with ourselves, we cease to strive for amendment.

A second sacrifice should be “all the vain things that charm me most.” The sight of the Cross should make us renounce all frothy frivolities. Bunyan’s pilgrims on their way to the City of God had to pass through Vanity Fair, which Beelzebub had established on both sides of the Way to tempt them to loiter round the stalls and make no further progress. Christians are beset by distractions which turn their attention away from the things that really matter. Savonarola’s preaching made so deep an impression on the frivolous city of Florence that the people made a great Bonfire of Vanities in the City Square. The children went from door to door shouting, “Bring out your vanities.” What could you profitably contribute to a bonfire of that kind?

All the vain things that charm me most
I sacrifice them to His Blood.

Watts felt however that more was needed than a Bonfire of Vanities:

Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

Dickens once wrote: “My rule is never to put my hand to anything, into which I cannot throw my whole self.” That is a splendid rule for Religion. When General Booth was asked, “How is it that you have managed to accomplish so much more than most people?” he answered, “I don’t know, unless it is that, when I gave myself to the Lord, I gave all that there was of me.” That is the pledge we make in our Post-communion Prayer: “Here we offer and present unto Thee ourselves, our souls and bodies.” Remember the Four Alls —“all thy heart, all thy soul, all thy mind, all thy strength.” That is what is implied when we sing, “Love so amazing demands my all.”

There is a monument to Watts in Westminster Abbey and a statue in the park called by his name in his native town, Southampton, but perhaps the most striking memorial is a stained-glass window at Freeby in Leicestershire, which represents him still surveying the Cross on which the Prince of Glory died.

In early days this hymn was sung to a form of *Tallis’ Canon* known as *Suffolk*; but, when Dr. Miller, organist of Doncaster Parish Church, published in 1790 his book of *Psalm Tunes*, the one called *Rockingham* was almost at once appropriated to these words, and its use has become universal.

CHAPTER XIII

FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION

O God, our Help in ages past

A.M.; E.H.; S.P.; A.M.R.; Meth.; Presb.; Cong.; Cong.P.; Bp.; Irish; Can.;
Am.

It is said that, when Benjamin Jowett was Master of Balliol, he once asked a tea-party of Oxford dons to jot down what they considered the finest English hymns. Each list contained only one, and in every case it was the same: “O God, our Help in ages past.” Of all Watts’ hymns the most moving may be “When I survey,” but the most popular is undoubtedly this one. It has become indispensable on all national religious occasions. No Remembrance Day Service would be considered complete without it. Gillman in his *Evolution of the English Hymn* speaks of “its simple strength, its hold on the common mind, its straightforwardness, its accentual perfection,” and adds, “If nothing else had come from his pen, it justifies its author’s memorial in Westminster Abbey.” Charles Wesley, his successor, sometimes indulged in long and impressive words—

Those amaranthine bowers
Inalienably ours—

but Watts in spite of his learning always stuck to plain, straightforward Anglo-Saxon. Of the 132 words in this hymn, 106 are monosyllables.

It represents a new experiment in his versification. He had begun as a rather contemptuous critic of Metrical Psalms; but, when Addison published in the *Spectator* his version of the Twenty-third, “The Lord my pasture shall prepare,” followed a month later by his magnificent paraphrase of the Nineteenth, “The spacious firmament on high,” Watts saw that it was possible to turn Hebrew Psalms into fine Christian hymns, and determined to try his hand at it.

Then in 1714 came a dangerous political crisis. Queen Anne was dying, and she would leave no heir. The country would have to look elsewhere for a King. Half her Ministers were known to be plotting (it was thought with the Queen’s connivance) to bring back the exiled Stuarts. The other half were determined to make George of Hanover King. Both sides were secretly arming, and it looked as though the country would be plunged into civil war. For Protestants moreover the position was specially alarming, for James Stuart, “the Old Pretender,” was a fanatical Papist, and, if he gained the throne, they dreaded the relighting of the fires of Smithfield.

At this time of deep anxiety Watts produced for his London congregation his version of the Ninetieth Psalm, “Lord, Thou hast been our Refuge from one generation to another,” and gave it the title, “Man frail, but God eternal.” The original

Psalm had been composed more than two thousand years before by some Hebrew poet, who, so modern scholars think, was hiding in the mountains with one of the hunted rebel bands, which under the Maccabees were engaged in a gallant Resistance Movement against the Greek conquerors. Its central message was, “God has never failed us in the past; so we can trust Him for the future.” This seemed to Watts just the thought that his nervous congregation needed.

“O God, our Help” is gloriously free from any doctrinal partisanship. It can be sung by Christians of all denominations. Most of it needs no comment; though it might be open for discussion, whether Wesley’s change of the opening word from “Our” to “O” is really an improvement, yet most books have adopted it. “Our God” sounds more intimate and personal. Another alteration which Wesley made, when he included the hymn in his own book, was to drop three of Watts’ verses; and here too other editors have followed his example. Half way through the Psalm the writer digressed to speak of the mutability of all things mundane: “In the morning they are like grass which groweth up. In the evening it is cut down and withereth.” Watts followed the Psalmist in his digression:

Like flowery fields the nations stand,
Pleased with the morning light;
The flowers beneath the mower’s hand
Lie withering ere ’tis night.

There is fine poetry in these verses, but the hymn has a closer-knit unity without them.

A third point that has been debated is whether “Time like an ever-rolling stream” was a misprint in the first edition for “over-rolling,” a misprint which later editions have copied; for the words, which in the Prayer-book version run, “As soon as Thou scatterest them,” in the Bible are translated, “Thou carriest them away as with a flood.” But, whatever Watts originally wrote, there is no doubt that “ever-rolling” gives the better picture. The passing of years is not like some sudden, devastating inundation. But it is wonderfully like a great river rolling on relentlessly, inexorably to the sea. No one can stay its course. No one can turn it back.

There is one line however that is almost always sung with misunderstanding. Who are the “sons” who “fly forgotten as a dream”? The use of this hymn on Remembrance Day is sometimes criticized. “We are here,” it is said, “to remember our dead not to confess that we are forgetting them.” But the sons of Time are not people, but days and weeks and years. The Bible version, which is the one that Watts was paraphrasing, makes this perfectly clear: “A thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday. They [i.e. the years] are as a sleep.” It is past years that fly forgotten as new duties dawn. But God, Who has helped us “in ages past,” is “our Hope for years to come.”

Sufficient is Thine arm alone
And our defence is sure.

This was the hope with which the Jewish Psalmist encouraged the ill-armed Maquis of his day to continue their struggle against the Greek army with its chariots and elephant corps. This was the hope with which Watts heartened his city

merchants and their wives to face the political perils caused by the death of Queen Anne. This is the hope with which we can confront the perils of an atomic age.

Doctors are emphatic that innumerable ailments have their roots in fear. It injures the body, causing all sorts of obscure nervous troubles. It weakens the mind, sowing seeds of hysteria and insanity. It warps the soul, which can never be healthy while worries are gnawing at it. At all costs this must be conquered. An Eastern fable tells how an Arab met the Plague one day. "Where are you going?" he asked. "To Bagdad to slay five thousand." Later he met it again and protested, "You threatened to kill five thousand, but you killed fifty thousand." "Not so," replied the Plague, "I slew only five thousand. The rest all died of fear." The best nerve specialists agree that the only known antidote to fear is faith. Happy are those who have faith to say, "The Lord is my Shepherd. I will fear no evil." Earl Haig said a fine thing during the First World War: "A Christian has no right to be discouraged in the same world as God."

The Foreword of this book gave some strange words which are found in old-fashioned hymns. Among these was Ebenezer. John Newton, the writer of "How sweet the Name of Jesus sounds," declared in one of his hymns:

Each sweet Ebenezer I have in review
Confirms His good pleasure to help me quite through.

Ebenezer means "stone of help." Samuel gave this name to the menhir which he erected to commemorate his victory over the Philistines, saying "Hitherto hath the Lord helped me." Newton meant that, as he looked back on

the times God had helped him in the past, he felt sure that God would not fail him in the future. And this is the theme of Watts' hymn too. The help God has given "in ages past" guarantees His protection "while troubles last" and "for years to come." The panicky congregation at Pinners' Hall must be taught to say, "What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee."

This hymn is now always sung to the tune known as *St. Anne*, composed by W. Croft, organist of St. Anne's, Soho, for "As pants the hart" in 1708.

CHAPTER XIV

THE JOY OF SALVATION

Oh for a thousand tongues to sing

A.M.; E.H.; S.P.; A.M.R.; Presb.; Meth.; Cong.; Cong.P.; Bp.; Irish; Can.; Am.

The next great hymn-writer after Watts was Charles Wesley. He and his brother John were leaders of the Methodist Revival, which put fresh life into the deadly dullness of eighteenth-century Religion. They were not only tireless and triumphant mission preachers, but they fixed their message in their converts' hearts by giving them hymns to sing. Sermons are soon forgotten, but hymns repeated week after week leave a permanent impression. The *Collection of Hymns for the People called Methodists*, which John Wesley published in 1780, has been described by Dr. Martineau, the distinguished Unitarian, as "the greatest instrument of popular culture that Christendom has produced." Another non-Methodist, Bernard Manning, Senior Tutor of Jesus College, Cambridge, was, if possible, an even more enthusiastic admirer. "This little book," he wrote, "ranks in Christian literature with the Psalms, the Book of Common Prayer, and the Canon of the Mass. In its own way it is perfect, unapproachable, elemental

in its perfection. You cannot alter it except to mar it. It is a work of supreme devotional art by a religious genius.” Of its 525 hymns 486 were by Charles. Altogether he is said to have written the almost incredible number of 6,500, most of which have of course long dropped out of use; but at least twenty have won a deservedly permanent place in almost every hymnal.

All the Methodist books from 1749 down to the present day have begun with his rapturous pæan of praise, “Oh for a thousand tongues.” Wherever men have revered their Gods or rejoiced in their power, they have voiced their feelings in song. Plato, speaking of the sacrifices in Pagan Greece, said: “There should be hymns and praises of the Gods intermingled with the prayers.” And few of our Christian praise-songs are more fervent and whole-hearted than this by Charles Wesley. Its spirit is well summed up by the text which *Ancient and Modern* prints at its head: “When ye glorify the Lord, put forth all your strength, for ye can never go far enough.”

As Wesley wrote it, it was a poem of seventy-two lines; but, when his brother put it into his *Hymns for the People called Methodists*, he cut off the first six verses and the last six, and almost every subsequent editor has done the same. The words, which then became the opening line, were borrowed from a German hymn in the Moravian *Gesangbuch*, “*O dass ich tausend Zungen hatte*” (Oh that I had a thousand tongues), though the remaining lines are entirely different. Peter Böhler, Wesley’s Moravian friend, had recalled this line to his memory, when he exclaimed, “Had I a thousand tongues, I would praise God with them all!”

Like everything that Charles wrote, the hymn is full of echoes of the Bible. For example, Christ's words, "The dead shall hear the Voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live," clearly suggested:

He speaks, and listening to His Voice
New life the dead receive.

Again, the text, "He hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor; He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted," obviously lies behind the lines:

The broken, mournful hearts rejoice;
The humble poor believe.

While Isaiah's prophecy, "Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing," was turned into the invitation:

Hear Him, ye deaf. His praise, ye dumb,
Your loosened tongues employ.
Ye blind, behold your Saviour come,
And leap, ye lame, with joy.

And there may also have come into his mind memories of old Latin hymns. "'Tis music in the sinners' ears" sounds suspiciously like a line in the *Gloriosi Salvatoris*, which Neale translated later, "'Tis the Name that whoso preaches finds it music in his ear."

But praise, if it is to be genuine, must be grounded on something. Wesley tells us that he wrote this hymn on the first

anniversary of his conversion. He was praising God for what he regarded as the most miraculous day of his life. On Whitsunday 1738 his whole outlook on Religion had been revolutionized. It was not a conversion from godlessness. For twelve years he had been an exceptionally devout and energetic clergyman. He had observed the Church's rule of Daily Service, frequent Communion, Fast, and Festival so methodically, that he and his friends had been nicknamed Methodists.

I fasted, read, and worked, and prayed,
Called holy friendship to my aid,
And constant to the altar drew.

But he had grown thoroughly dissatisfied with his spiritual condition. He knew that he was not finding in his Religion the joy and strength and sense of triumph that the Bible taught him to expect. Conversions have been traced to many strange sources, but Wesley's was probably the only one that ever sprang from a voice through a keyhole. That Sunday night he lay ill in bed, and was settling down to sleep, when he was startled by a cry, "Believe, and thou shalt be healed." A devout but quite illiterate servant-girl in the house where he lodged had been distressed by their lodger's obvious melancholia. As he was a scholar and a clergyman, she dared not speak to him about Religion; so she crept upstairs and shouted her message through the closed door.

This unexpected voice set him thinking as he lay in bed. "Believe!" Was the root of his trouble a lack of Faith? Had he laboriously been trying to earn salvation, instead of looking to Christ to save him? The simple thought flashed into his mind

that we are saved by the love we trust, not by the love we show. The effect was electrifying. His mood of morbid introspection vanished. Like Bunyan's pilgrim he felt that a crushing burden had fallen from his shoulders. In lines, now dropped from the hymn, he wrote:

On this glad day the glorious Sun
Of Righteousness arose;
On my benighted soul He shone
And filled it with repose.
Sudden expired the legal strife.
'Twas then I ceased to grieve.
My second, real, living life
I then began to live.

He experienced immense exhilaration. No language seemed too extravagant to express his feelings.

I rode on the sky, freely justified I,
Nor envied Elijah his seat.
My soul mounted higher in a chariot of fire,
And the moon it was under my feet.

His mental relief affected his body. He began to recover his health; and for the next seventeen years he rode tirelessly from one end of England to the other proclaiming everywhere the Gospel of Justification by Faith. It was when he thought how his life had been changed by that keyhole message that he felt that he needed 999 extra tongues to express his feelings adequately; and then he added the prayer:

My gracious Master and my God
Assist me to proclaim

And spread through all the earth abroad
The honours of Thy Name.

How many of those who sing this lustily in church and chapel put into this prayer a tenth of the fervour that Wesley felt when he wrote it?

Ancient and Modern omits a verse, which all other books including the *English Hymnal* preserve, a verse which strikes one characteristic keynote of the Methodist Revival. John Wesley asked, “Can God do nothing with sin but pardon it?” His brother answered:

He breaks the power of cancelled sin;
He sets the sinner free.

The next chapter will show how much the Methodists made of this truth, that God not only forgives sin but frees men from its power, that the Gospel promise is “a heart from sin set free.” Here is another fact that may well make us feel that a single tongue is not enough to voice our thankfulness.

This hymn has never been wedded to a tune that everyone has accepted. Methodists used to sing it to *Winchester Old*, but their present book sets it to *Richmond*. A. J. Eyre, Organist at the Crystal Palace, composed *Selby* for *Ancient and Modern*. Other books have set the words to almost any familiar common-metre tune, such as *Oxford New*, *St. James*, *St. Leonard* or *Sawley*. One to which it undoubtedly goes well is *University* as set in *Congregational Praise*.

CHAPTER XV

LOVE DIVINE

Love Divine, all loves excelling

A.M.; E.H.; S.P.; A.M.R.; Presb.; Meth.; Cong.; Cong.P.; Bp.; Irish; Can.;
Am.

All the world loves a love story, Jacob and Rachael, Romeo and Juliet, Orpheus and Euridice, Hero and Leander; but to Charles Wesley there was a more wonderful wooing still. So one day he sat down to hymn the strangest love story of all, a love “all loves excelling,” the love of Christ for sinners. Every hymn-writer chooses a metre suited to his theme, light and lilting for joyous words, staid and sedate for solemn ones. When Wesley wrote, everyone was humming the tune which Purcell had set to the Song of Venus in Dryden’s play, *King Arthur*:

Fairest isle, all isles excelling,
Seat of pleasures and of loves,
Venus here will chose her dwelling,
And forsake her Cyprian groves.

With this in his mind Wesley began his hymn:

Love Divine, all loves excelling,
Joy of Heaven to earth come down,
Fix in us Thy humble dwelling
And Thy faithful mercies crown.

The early Methodists sang it to Purcell's air; but this did not make a good hymn-tune. *Ancient and Modern* brought Stainer's *Love Divine* into fairly general use; but almost every book sets these words to a different tune. In Canada they sing it to *Gotha*, in America to the Welsh *Hyfrydol*, and this is adopted by *Congregational Praise*. *Ancient and Modern Revised* gives a fine setting by Stanford. But no tune has yet been accepted as inevitably the right one.

This hymn is another illustration of Wesley's habit of weaving into his verses thoughts and phrases from all parts of the Bible. For example, St. Paul told the Corinthians, "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature" (Father Knox translates this, "everything has become new about him"); and Wesley as an Oxford scholar remembered that the Greek literally said, "There is a new creation." So he prayed, "Finish now Thy new creation," i.e. Don't leave Thy work half done. Again "Changed from glory into glory" is borrowed from the same Epistle, where St. Paul says, "We are changed into the same image [i.e. the likeness of Christ] from glory to glory," that is to say, steadily progressing from one stage of glory to another. Weymouth translates it, "From one degree of radiant holiness to another." "Visit us with Thy salvation" comes almost word for word from the One Hundred and Sixth Psalm. "Let us see Thy great salvation perfectly restored" echoes another Psalmist's prayer, "Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation"; while "Till we cast our crowns before Thee" was obviously

suggested by St. John's vision of the Elders casting their crowns before the throne. One needs a pretty thorough knowledge of the Bible to recognize and grasp the meaning of all Wesley's allusions.

But what about the hymn as a whole? It is addressed to Christ, "Jesu, Thou art all compassion." He is God's Love Incarnate. He is the "Joy of Heaven to earth come down." And it is a prayer to Him to come and dwell in our hearts. Wesley remembered such texts as, "I bow my knees unto the Father that Christ may dwell in your hearts," and the Communion prayer that asks that He may dwell in us. So he taught his converts to pray, "Fix in us Thy humble dwelling"; "Enter every trembling heart"; "Nevermore Thy temples leave." The last petition is a reference to the text, "Ye are the temple of God."

As in many of his hymns there rings through this one a sense of tremendous urgency. He is not content with any half-way house. "Finish now Thy new creation. Pure and sinless let us be." Later editors have jibbed at that word "sinless," and substituted "spotless," though the distinction between the two words is not very obvious. But Wesley could easily defend his original adjective. Did not the *Te Deum* ask, "Vouchsafe, O Lord, to keep us this day without sin?" And did not the Prayer-book tell him each morning to pray, "Grant that this day we fall into no sin?" The Church's ideal evidently was that every day should be sinless.

This was by no means a usual aspiration. The *Westminster Confession*, the standard synopsis of Puritan theology, declared: "No man is able, either by himself or by any grace

received in this life, perfectly to keep the commandments of God.” And in most of the pulpits in church and chapel it was taken for granted that man’s nature is so hopelessly corrupt that it is beyond the power of God’s grace to cleanse it entirely. The stress was always laid on the need for penitence rather than the hope of perfection. But both the Wesley brothers vehemently denounced this pessimism. Quoting our Lord’s command, “Be ye perfect,” and St. Paul’s words, “The God of peace sanctify you wholly,” they urged their converts to remember that God is faithful not only “to forgive us our sins,” but “to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” They exhorted them to pray and strive for perfection. This was the theme of more than one of Charles’ hymns:

Oh, for a heart to praise my God,
A heart from sin set free;

Or again:

He breaks the power of cancelled sin;
He sets the prisoner free;

or yet again:

Let others hug their chains,
For Sin and Satan plead,
And say, From Sin’s remains
They never can be freed.
Rejoice in hope; rejoice with me.
We shall from all our sins be free.

So the whole of our present hymn leads up to the climax,
“Pure and sinless may we be.”

This teaching roused much controversy, part of which was due to the fact that each side meant something different by the word “sin.” John Wesley’s definition was “a voluntary violation of a known law of God,” a definition almost identical with that of St. Augustine. But to his critics “sin” was a cancer much more deeply ingrained, often due more to instinct or ignorance than to deliberate disobedience. Many a disgusting hypocrite is sublimely unconscious of his hypocrisy. Many a violation of the rights of others is done through sheer thoughtlessness. And then there is that mysterious taint in our nature that theologians call Original Sin. To claim that it was possible to be saved from all this seemed to Wesley’s critics almost blasphemous presumption. But their horror arose from disregarding what Wesley meant by “sin.” To abstain from wilful evil-doing is surely something that every Christian should aim at, nor need we imagine that it is beyond the power of God’s grace to enable us to reach this comparatively modest ideal.

The Wesleys taught that there are two stages in the Christian life, Conversion, which is a change in our relation to God, and Sanctification, which is a change in ourselves. Salvation is not merely something done for us. It is something done in us. Sometimes no doubt Charles in his eagerness overstepped the mark. His brother removed one verse from this hymn before he would allow it to be included in his book, the one beginning, “Take away the power of sinning”; for, if that prayer were answered, we should become mere puppets. But no one can deny that the stress that he laid on Sanctification

was badly needed. To “be saved” is not to be saved from Hell, but to be saved from sin. The brothers went out into the highways and hedges with the good news that even the worst of sinners could be saved from his sin. And this was undoubtedly part of the secret of the success of their Mission. They added to it the warning that no one who was clinging to any known sin had the right to call himself a Christian. So a strong, wholesome core of ethics ran through the whole movement:

From all iniquity, from all,
He shall my soul redeem.

They kept perpetually before their followers the ideal, “Sinless let us be.” This was “the great salvation” for which our hymn prays.

CHAPTER XVI

THE SINNER'S S O S

Jesu, Lover of my soul

A.M.; E.H.; S.P.; A.M.R.; Presb; Meth.; Cong.; Cong.P.; Bp.; Irish; Can.; Am.

Of all Charles Wesley's hymns the best loved beyond a doubt is "Jesu, Lover of my soul." No hymn in the English language has made a deeper emotional appeal to all sorts and conditions of men. Henry Ward Beecher said, "I would rather have written those words than have all the fame of all the kings who have ever reigned on earth." Yet no hymn of the first rank has been more severely criticized. The censors who would purge out of every hymn-book all mention of "me" or "my" take strong exception to Wesley's mention of "my soul," "my sin," though apparently they do not object to saying "I believe" in the Creed or to singing the Psalm, "The Lord is my Shepherd." Yet, when Canon Ellerton was editing *Church Hymns*, he spoke of "Jesu, Lover of my soul" as "absolutely on the line which separates hymns for public worship from those for private devotion." Bishop Wordsworth regarded it as "inexpressibly shocking to hear this sung by a large congregation."

Other critics have felt that there is something slightly unsavoury about an emotional hymn. "Lover" is one of the words that they put on their *Index Expurgatorius*. We have seen how a line in the translation of *Jesu, dulcis memoria*, "None but Thy lovers know," was changed to "None but Thy loved ones." So now John Wesley regarded such an expression as "Lover of my soul" as inexcusably amatory, even though his brother had taken it from the Wisdom of Solomon in the Apocrypha: "Thou sparest all, for they are Thine, O Lord, Thou Lover of souls." For sixty years this hymn was excluded from every edition of the Methodist hymn-book. Yet, when hearts are full, the emotions clamour for utterance, and Charles deliberately wrote many of his hymns to provide an outlet for emotion. It is a perfectly sound psychological rule that impression should always be given an opportunity for expression.

A more reasonable criticism is that Wesley seems to have got his metaphors into a curious tangle. In the first verse, for example, a bird seeking a bosom becomes a ship seeking a haven, and Christ is at one and the same time the pilot and the harbour. These mixed metaphors are probably responsible for some of the legends that have arisen about the origin of this hymn. One says that a dove pursued by a hawk took refuge inside Wesley's ulster, and paper-knives carved from the window-ledge on which he is said to have been leaning are still treasured in many Methodist homes. Another story tells how a sea-gull flew in at his open window, seeking shelter from a storm. A third declares that he composed the hymn while watching a fishing-boat fight its way through a storm to the shelter of a Cornish pier. But for none of these legends does there seem to be a scrap of contemporary

evidence. The main thought in his mind when he wrote was perhaps the story of St. Peter's attempt to walk on the sea; for in the third of his five verses, which most books omit, he cried:

Lo, I sink! I faint! I fall!
Reach me out Thy gracious Hand.

But all this maze of metaphors coalesces into a moving picture of a storm-tossed soul flying to Christ for safety. And what is the storm? When Wesley printed this hymn, he headed it, "In Temptation."

The third line of the first verse has given trouble to editors. Wesley wrote, "While the nearer waters roll," and some prosaic person asked, "Why nearer? If the waters rolled at all, they would all do so, not merely those in the immediate neighbourhood." So *Ancient and Modern* changed this to "the gathering waters," *Church Hymns* to "the waters nearer roll," other books to "troubled waters," "raging waters," "threatening waters." Dr. Julian in his *Dictionary of Hymnology* defends Wesley's adjective at considerable length: "Men cry for help, not against dangers that are distant and undefined, but out of the depths of their immediate troubles." The sea may be just as rough a couple of miles away, but it is "the nearer waters" that are the urgent menace. But as a matter of fact "nearer" is probably an unconscious plagiarism. Wesley greatly admired the works of the almost-forgotten poet, Matthew Prior. In one of his letters to his daughter Sally he urged her to learn part of Prior's *Solomon* by heart. In this poem Prior makes Solomon speak of the danger of dalliance with temptation:

We weave the Chaplet and we crown the bowl,
And smiling see the nearer waters roll,
Till the strong gusts of raging passions rise,
Till the dire tempest mingles earth and skies,
And, swift into the boundless ocean borne,
Our fatal confidence too late we mourn.

With these lines in his memory, when Wesley compared waters with temptation, the word “nearer” automatically, and not unsuitably, slipped into his mind.

His fourth verse has been dropped by *Ancient and Modern* and several other books, because the line, “I am all unrighteousness,” seemed to savour of Calvinism and its grim Doctrine of the Total Depravity of Man. But this was assuredly not Wesley’s meaning, for in the Calvinistic Controversy, which was raging fiercely at this time, the two brothers were both protagonists on the anti-Calvinist side.

His last verse is in every book. Here the metaphor changes. Wesley knew that our trouble is often more internal than external, not a tempest of temptation without, but gangrene within. Christ is no longer pictured as a Harbour of Refuge but as a Fountain, “Thou of life the Fountain art.” We are “full of sin,” and the only remedy for sin is what theologians call “grace.” Grace is heavenly help for earthly living. It is God’s strength put at the disposal of man’s weakness. The Prayer-book is constantly praying, “Grant us grace to withstand temptation,” “grace to amend our lives,” “grace to cast away the works of darkness.” So Wesley writes:

Plenteous grace with Thee is found,
Grace to cleanse from every sin,

Let the healing streams abound.
Make and keep me pure within.

He was always returning to this thought of the power and the plenteousness of grace. In another hymn he says of grace:

Its streams the whole creation reach,
So plenteous is the store,
Enough for all, enough for each,
Enough for evermore.

As in all his hymns many lines are paraphrases of Bible texts. “Thou of life the Fountain art” is the Psalmist’s “With Thee is the Fountain of Life.” “Freely let me take of Thee” is based on the invitation “Take of the Water of Life freely.” The Israelites’ song in Numbers, “Spring up, O Well,” suggested the prayer, “Spring Thou up within my heart.” And, since St. John spoke of “a well of water springing up unto eternal life,” the hymn ends with the petition, “Rise to all eternity.”

The main thought of the hymn however is the impossibility of self-salvation. We cannot be our own saviours. “All my life,” wrote Seneca, the Stoic philosopher, “I have been trying to climb out of the pit of my besetting sins. And I can’t do it; and I never shall, unless a hand is stretched down to draw me up.” Wesley agrees. In contrast to Henley’s arrogant boast:

I am the Master of my fate.
I am the Captain of my soul—

he confessed that without Christ he must founder. “All my trust on Thee is stayed.” “More than all in Thee I find.”

For the first hundred years of its life these words were sung to *Hotham*, a tune still found in the Methodist book, set to another of Wesley's hymns. But, when Dykes wrote *Hollingside* for *Ancient and Modern* this rapidly supplanted *Hotham*. Now however Parry's *Aberystwyth* is becoming a formidable rival. It is given as an alternative in *Ancient and Modern Revised*, *English Hymnal*, the Presbyterian, the Methodist, the Baptist and the Irish books, while *Songs of Praise*, *Congregational Praise*, and the American book give it the first place.

CHAPTER XVII

THE CLEFT ROCK

Rock of Ages, cleft for me

A.M.; E.H.; S.P.; A.M.R.; Presb.; Meth.; Cong.; Cong.P.; Bp.; Irish; Can.; Am.

Augustus Toplady, Vicar of Broadhembury, Devon, was a contemporary of the Wesleys, and, until they parted company on the question of Calvinism, of which he was an ardent advocate, he had been one of their fellow-workers in the Methodist Revival. He too wrote many hymns, but one by one most of these have dropped out of our hymn-books, till only “Rock of Ages” remains. This however has won as bright a halo as the best of Watts and Wesley. The *Dictionary of Hymnology* says: “No other hymn has laid so firm a grip on the English-speaking world.” Critics as well as Christians praise it. Professor Saintsbury, looking at it purely from the literary point of view, declared: “Every word, every syllable of this really great poem has its place and meaning.” And Canon Dearmer called attention to its “unconscious art, the violence of the opening cry, the sweeping negatives of the next two verses, the growing exultation of the last, and then the quiet return at the end in a changed tone of gentle

confidence to the opening words.” It was written by an Evangelical of the Evangelicals; yet the Prince Consort, broadest of Broad Churchmen, repeated it constantly on his deathbed; and a strong High Churchman like Mr. Gladstone could speak of it as “the greatest hymn ever written”; and another High Churchman, A. C. Benson, after hearing it sung in Westminster Abbey at Gladstone’s funeral, wrote: “To have written words which come home to people in moments of high, deep, and passionate emotion, consecrating, consoling, uplifting, there can hardly be anything better worth doing than that.”

Yet its popularity is surprising. It breaks what ought to be the very first rule of hymn-craft: “Be intelligible. Remember that an average congregation is not very nimble-witted. It can’t follow you, if you hop like a flea over half the books of the Bible. It can’t stop in the middle of a verse to think out what you mean. If you expect ordinary folk to join in these words, you must move on their level.” But of “Rock of Ages” one critic quite justly complains, “Few hymns contain so many obscure allusions, which the man in the pew generally fails to grasp.”

Having made up his mind that he would compare our Lord to a Rock, Toplady seems to have sat down to hunt out all the references to rocks that he could find in the Bible. He expects us to remember:

(i) that a text in Isaiah, “The Lord is an everlasting Rock,” is translated in the margin “The Lord is a Rock of Ages” (Toplady however was not the first to notice this

rendering; a hundred years before, Vaughan the Silurist had written,

Thou Rock of Ages and the Rest
Of all that for Thee are oppressed);

(ii) that even Moses could not face the full splendour of God, but had to be hidden in the cleft of a rock;

(iii) that in another story Moses “clave” a rock, and a fountain of water gushed out;

(iv) that St. Paul hinted to the Corinthians that that rock might be taken as a symbol of Christ;

(v) that on Good Friday water and blood had flowed from our Lord’s pierced side. This seems an appalling muddle of metaphors; but the passionate intensity of the words overrides all these defects. We grasp that Christ is compared to a Rock that can shelter sinners from the awful, overwhelming purity of God, and a Rock from Whose Side a stream flows that is able to cleanse from sin.

Like “Jerusalem the Golden” this hymn had a peculiar origin. In 1776 Toplady was editor of *The Gospel Magazine*. A contributor sent an article attacking the Government for the size of the National Debt (What would he have said about the size of the debt today?): “When will the Government be able to pay? When there is more money in England’s Treasury than there is in all Europe. When will that be? Never.” Toplady printed this, but evidently thought it rather off the lines of a religious monthly; so he added “A Spiritual Improvement of the Foregoing.” He pointed out another debt

even more impossible to pay, and plunged into marvellous calculations. Wesley had defined sin as “a voluntary violation of a known law of God”; but this did not satisfy Toplady. To him the least deviation from absolute perfection was sin. So, since he believed that every time we fail to rise to the level of perfect sanctity this is reckoned against us as a sin, he estimated that we all commit at least one sin a second. So by twenty we have been guilty of more than six-hundred-and-thirty-million sins; by eighty the total will be 2,522,880,000 (and even then he overlooked the extra leap-year days)! So, if from our eightieth birthday we manage to live a perfect life, we shall still have this terrific *dossier* of more than two and a half thousand million past sins to answer for!

This arithmetic undoubtedly strikes a modern reader as fantastic. But at all events it made vivid the thought that we are responsible for our actions, and that the number of times when we have failed to do what we should have done is terrific. And Toplady ended his article with the verses that now form our hymn:

Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears for ever flow,
All for sin could not atone.
Thou must save, and Thou alone.

And to make his meaning unmistakable, he headed the lines, “A Living and Dying Prayer for the Holiest Believer in the World.” They were not written for use merely by outrageous sinners. The “Holiest Believer” has a host of sins for which he needs pardon. Today no one remembers Toplady’s arithmetic,

and few perhaps grasp all his Old Testament allusions; but his words still make us feel the reality and the seriousness of our sin, and the utter absurdity of trying to save ourselves. Toplady and Wesley might argue hotly about the meaning of Predestination, but they were wholly united, not only in their conviction that Christ alone can save—"Thou must save and Thou alone"—but also in their belief in what Toplady called "the double cure," salvation not only from the guilt of sin but also from its power.

Strange legends have gathered round Protestant hymns as they have around Catholic Saints. Charabanc drivers in the Mendips point out a cleft in a rock in Barrington Coombe, and tell their trippers that Toplady wrote the hymn there, while sheltering from a storm; and a brisk trade is done in postcards of the "Rock of Ages Cave." Dearmer sarcastically says: "This story was invented about the year 1850, perhaps by someone who thought that one little lie would hardly count among two thousand million sins." The story has been still further embellished. A *Sunday Graphic* Quiz recently asked, "What famous hymn was written on a playing-card?" Some romancer had added the detail, that Toplady had no paper with him in the cave; so he picked up a card, a six of diamonds, which some previous visitor had dropped, and wrote the hymn on that. We are told that the card is still preserved in America. If so, it is one of the many fakes, palmed off on innocent transatlantic tourists by fraudulent curio-dealers.

We sing the hymn today as Toplady wrote it, except for one line. In the last verse he said, "When my eye-strings break in death," which is not only ugly but incorrect,

for death does not snap the eye-tendons. *Ancient and Modern* changed it to, “When my eyelids close in death,” but this too is inaccurate. Eyelids do not close; they have to be closed. So the *English Hymnal* gave, “When mine eyes are closed in death,” to which there can be no objection.

For seventy-five years this hymn was sung to a great variety of tunes, including *Rousseau’s Dream*; but, when Redhead in 1853 published his *Church Hymn Tunes*, one of them soon became linked with these words, and it appears in almost every hymn-book. The *Report of the Archbishops’ Committee on Church Music* has said: “The last verse of Rock of Ages sung by a devout and trained congregation may be one of the most moving of musical experiences.” Taking the hymn as a whole, its theology is that of the eighteenth century and its imagery rather old-fashioned; but it remains a solemn and emphatic statement of the central truth of Christianity:

None other lamb, none other name,
None other hope in heaven or earth or sea,
None other hiding place from guilt and shame,
None beside Thee.

CHAPTER XVIII

A RADICAL JOURNALIST'S HYMN

Hail to the Lord's Anointed!

A.M.; E.H.; S.P.; A.M.R.; Meth.; Presb.; Cong.; Cong.P.; Bp.; Irish; Can.;
Am.

The new hymns did not kill the long-established popularity of the Psalms. Fresh versifiers and Christianizers of these arose, and few were more successful than James Montgomery. He was a sturdy North Country Radical, editor of the *Sheffield Register*, who had twice been imprisoned in York Castle for his political views, once for printing a song in commemoration of the Fall of the Bastille, once for his comments on the action of a magistrate in dispersing a riotous mob. He must be the only poet who has written two poems on *The Pleasures of Imprisonment*.

In Religion he was a Moravian. The Moravians traced their origin back to the work of John Huss in Bohemia; but, when their influence first began to be felt in England, they were a small, intensely devout, German Lutheran sect. When persecuted by their fellow-Lutherans some of them emigrated to America, and there John Wesley came to know them and to admire their piety. A few took refuge in England, and during

the religious ferment that followed the Methodist Mission they managed to make a number of converts, specially in the northern counties. Among these were Montgomery's parents, and, when they went as Moravian missionaries to Barbados, he was sent to a Moravian Training College near Leeds in the hope that he would follow in their steps. But he spent so much of his time in writing poetry, including an enormous epic in the style of Milton, in which the Archangel Michael lops off one of Satan's wings, that the college authorities lost patience, and decided that he was unfit for the Ministry. After working for a time in a baker's shop, he trudged from Leeds to London with only 3s. 6d. in his pocket to try to find a publisher for his poems, but failed. He walked back to Yorkshire and obtained a job as bookkeeper in the office of the ultra-Radical *Sheffield Register*. He began to contribute articles, and, when the editor had to bolt from the country to escape arrest for high treason, he took charge and edited the paper for thirty-one years, eventually becoming proprietor.

All his life he continued to produce an unending flow of poetry, sacred and secular, which included versions of thirty-eight Psalms and more than four hundred hymns. Most of the early English Moravian hymns are marred by an over-luscious mysticism of the Song of Solomon type, but Montgomery's are entirely free from this blemish. Many are in every hymnal, e.g. "For ever with the Lord," "Stand up and bless the Lord," "Songs of praise the Angels sang," "Go to dark Gethsemane," "Lift up your heads, ye gates of brass," and "O Spirit of the Living God." Dr. Julian in his *Dictionary of Hymnology* is usually rather frigidly judicial in his verdicts on his various hymnists, but he was moved to unwonted enthusiasm

by the hymns of Montgomery. “Richly poetic,” he writes, “without exuberance, dogmatic without uncharitableness, tender without sentimentality, elaborate without diffuseness, richly musical without apparent effort, he bequeathed to the Church wealth that could only have come from a true genius and a sanctified heart.”

His finest effort was undoubtedly his version of the Seventy-second Psalm. One dominating thought in Hebrew Religion was belief in the coming of a Messiah, Who would establish a Kingdom of Righteousness on earth. Then the exploitation of man by man would cease, swords would be beaten into ploughshares, and tears would be wiped away. The Jews interpreted this Psalm as a prophecy of His coming, and its promise of better social conditions made a strong appeal to Montgomery’s Radicalism. His version was written in 1821 to be sung as part of a Christmas Ode in a Yorkshire Moravian Settlement. In the following year he recited it in a speech at a Missionary Meeting in Liverpool. Dr. Adam Clarke, the commentator, happened to be in the chair, and he borrowed the words and inserted them in his Commentary as an exposition of the Psalm. In this way they became widely known, and soon found a place in every new hymnal. The old *Ancient and Modern* gave only four of the original seven verses. It omitted the characteristic lines—

He comes with succour speedy
To them who suffer wrong,
To help the poor and needy,
And bid the weak be strong—

and also the missionary verse (no Church has been more faithful to the missionary command than the Moravian):

Arabia's desert ranger
To Him shall bow the knee,
The Ethiopian stranger
His glory come to see.

Both these verses however are restored in the Revised Edition.

It is worth noticing how closely Montgomery reproduced the Psalmist's words. "He shall break in pieces the oppressor" becomes "He comes to break oppression." "He shall come down as showers that water the earth" becomes "He shall come down as showers upon the fruitful earth." "All kings shall fall down before Him" becomes "Kings shall fall down before Him." "His Name shall endure for ever" becomes "His Name shall stand for ever." But then Montgomery adds a comment that was not in the original. In his first version it ran, "His Name—what is it? Love." He altered this later to, "That Name to us is Love"; but many books have adopted Keble's emendation, "His changeless Name of Love."

There is however one vast difference between the Psalm and the hymn. To the Psalmist the promised Messiah was some future earthly monarch. To Montgomery "the Lord's Anointed" (and "Messiah" is merely the Hebrew word for "anointed") had come, and His Name was Jesus. The Greek word for "anointed" is "*christos*"; so Greek-speaking Jews spoke of the Messiah as "the Christ." When the Baptist said, "I am not the Christ," he meant, "I am not the Messiah." When St. Peter said, "Thou art the Christ," he

meant, “Thou art the Messiah.” So, when we call ourselves Christians, i.e. the Christ’s men, we proclaim ourselves followers of the Messiah Whom the Jewish Prophets foretold. And, whenever we sing this hymn, we declare that the Yorkshire Radical was right, that Jesus is the Leader anointed by God to establish His Kingdom on earth.

He comes to break oppression,
To set the captive free.

It is essentially a Christian Socialist’s hymn.

We often forget how large a part this thought of a Kingdom of God on earth played in our Lord’s teaching; and it would put new life into the Church if we could recapture this vision. In Priestley’s play, *They came to a City*, some everyday folk are suddenly switched into an incredibly beautiful city. Some find life there intolerably dull and hurry back to their old haunts. Others find it so entrancing that they refuse to leave. But a young sailor and his girl see in it a call to service. They must go back and tell others what they have seen. “And every time we find a spark of vision in anyone, we will blow it into a blaze.” This is the feeling that Montgomery hoped to rouse by his picture of a God-ruled world.

This hymn is so often sung at Epiphanytide, that the Kings who “fall down before Him” suggest the thought of the Magi, who probably were not Kings at all. This was certainly not the Psalmist’s meaning, for he said, “*All* Kings shall fall down”; nor was it Montgomery’s, though he added, “And gold and incense bring,” for he spoke of the future, “Kings *shall* fall down,” not of something that happened long ago. He was thinking of the day when all the Kingdoms of

this world would become a Kingdom of God, when, to quote the words in which Watts had paraphrased this same Psalm, Jesus would “reign where’er the sun doth his successive journeys run,” which is only another way of saying,

All nations shall adore Him,
His praise all people sing.

In Montgomery’s day the hymn was sung to a tune called *Culmstock*; but most modern books have adopted the one which Monk chose for *Ancient and Modern*. It is an adaptation by himself of a seventeenth-century chorale by the Lutheran composer, Johann Cruger.

CHAPTER XIX

THE PILLAR OF FIRE

*Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling
gloom*

A.M.; E.H.; S.P.; A.M.R.; R.C.; Meth.; Presb.; Cong.; Cong.P.; Bp.; Irish;
Can.; Am.

Some years ago Americans organized a Parliament of Religions at Chicago, and invited Believers of every type, Christians, Pagans, Mohammedans, to send representatives to discuss their rival conceptions of Truth. It was suggested that each session should open with a hymn. But was there a hymn that Catholics and Protestants, Jews and Moslems, Buddhists and Hindus, Parsees and Confucians, could all sing together? At first this seemed improbable; but “Lead, kindly Light” was found to be a prayer in which all could join. Every Religion is seeking light “amid the encircling gloom.”

This hymn was written in the strait that separates Corsica from Sardinia. There on June 16th, 1833, an Italian cutter laden with oranges lay becalmed. The only passenger was John Henry Newman, a young Oxford don, returning to his

college from a holiday in Sicily. Ever since as a boy of nine he had scribbled in one of his books,

Into the Palace of the Lord
Those who do right and keep His Word
Will surely go; and those who don't
I am quite certain that they won't,

he had been an inveterate rhymester. But with years his style had improved; and this hobby helped to pass the time on his tedious voyage. He had just had an experience that had moved him deeply. In a dirty Sicilian inn a bout of fever had brought him to death's door. But he had recovered. And he felt that this new lease of life had been given him for some purpose. What should he do with it?

As he sat on deck he read in his Bible how a luminous cloud had led the Israelites through the Wilderness after dark. When marching by night to avoid the heat it was easy to lose their way, but there was no danger for those who followed the guiding light. True, they could not see far ahead. "The distant scene" was hidden. But they had learnt to say, "One step enough for me." And by following God's lead step by step they arrived at the Promised Land. Newman took this message to heart. He said, "I must do the same." And he took up his pencil and wrote: "Lead, kindly Light. I do not ask to see the distant scene, one step enough for me." And, when he published the poem later, he headed it, "The Pillar of the Cloud."

The verses are so intensely personal that the editors of *Ancient and Modern* hesitated for a time to admit them to their book. Newman himself said of them, "They are not a

hymn, nor are they suitable for singing.” But, when set to music, they became one of the most popular hymns in the language. There are three verses. The first deals with the Present, the second with the Past, the third with the Future. The first says, “I am,” the next, “I was,” the last, “it will.”

The first says, “I feel like a traveller overtaken by darkness in a strange land. I am far from home, and I need a Guide.” Many have felt like that. A Tamil hymn a thousand years old cried:

Lord, in the darkness I wander.
Where is the light? Is there light?

And even a devout, young, nineteenth-century clergyman like Newman was puzzled as to whether he was on the right path. Was he making the best use of his life by spending his time as an Oxford tutor coaching undergraduates in the classics? “The night is dark. Lead Thou me on.” In one of his books Stanley Jones says that what most Christians lack is “the sense of being led.” If there is a God, He must have some plan for our lives, and He alone can show us what that is. If we are not God-led, we shall probably be mob-led. “The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord.” “As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.”

The next verse speaks of the Past: “I was not always thus.” He tells us in his *Apologia*, “I had formed no religious convictions till I was fifteen.” In his private Diary he confessed: “I am very bad-tempered, vain, proud, arrogant, prone to argue, and vehement.” A few pages later he described a terrific row with his father over a trivial matter, and admits, “I have been sadly deficient in meekness,

patience, and filial obedience.” His sister recalled many years later a tussle which as a small boy he had with his mother. “You see, John,” she said when the fight was over, “you didn’t get your own way.” “No, mother,” he replied, “but I tried very hard.” When he looked back over his past life, he said, “Pride ruled my will. Remember not past years.” Not that he had been notoriously wicked; but he had been self-willed. “I loved to choose my path.” He wanted to go his own way and know exactly where he was going. “I loved the garish day.” There is nothing particularly heinous about the word “garish.” It simply means “glittering.” In the older poets it is a common epithet for the sun. Newman says that in his youth he liked to see his path quite clearly, to walk by sight and not by faith, and to know exactly where he was going. “But now,” he says, “I realize that life is full of mysteries. I live surrounded by things I cannot understand. Forgive the foolishness of my past years. All I ask now is to be led, as Thou leddest Thy People of old. I leave the choice of the path to Thee.”

The final verse deals with the Future. The path may perhaps be dull. It may lead “O’er moor and fen,” and moors and marshes (i.e. fens) are not exciting things to travel through. Or it may be dangerous, crossing crag and torrent, as in some of the mountains that Newman had climbed in Sicily. But, if it is God’s path, it will lead straight home, till

with the morn those Angel faces smile
Which I have loved long since and lost awhile.

In his old age a correspondent asked Newman what he had meant by “those Angel faces.” He replied that after fifty years

he could not remember. There should be, he wrote, “a statute of limitation for writers of verse; it would be tyranny if, in an art which is the expression of imagination and sentiment, one were obliged to be ready for examination on the trivial states of mind, which come upon one when home-sick or sea-sick or in any other way excited.”

Nevertheless it is practically certain that, when he wrote *Angels*, he meant Angels. He had been an imaginative child. In the garden of his old home near Richmond he had played games with Angels as other children have played with Fairies. “I thought life might be a dream,” he wrote in his *Apologia*, “and I an Angel, and all this world a deception, my fellow-Angels by a playful device concealing themselves from me.” Wordsworth had recently written, “Heaven lies about us in our infancy”; but “the things that I have seen I now can see no more.” And Newman was obviously regretting that he had outgrown the feeling of friendship with the Angels that had once been so real to him as a child.

Those who treasure no angelic childish memories may take their choice of two interpretations, either of which is legitimate. In a scarlet-fever epidemic Archbishop Tait lost five little daughters. Their portraits hung on his study wall with the words underneath:

With the Morn those Angel faces smile
Which I have loved long since and lost awhile.

Reunion with those we have loved will be one of the joys of the Future.

Another explanation makes “the Angel faces” refer to the hopes and ideals of youth. In middle age youthful enthusiasm

tends to evaporate. This has been described as “the sickness that destroyeth in the noon-day.” Adults are often sadly conscious of a cooling of spiritual fervour. Like Cowper they deplore:

What peaceful hours I once enjoyed!
How sweet their memory still!
But they have left an aching void
The world can never fill.

And many would like to believe that, when they see things as they really are, their lost enthusiasms will revive.

This is one of the hymns that owe a great deal to their tune. The words lay almost unnoticed for more than thirty years in the files of the *British Magazine* and in *Lyra Apostolica*, till Dykes set them to music. Newman himself acknowledged, “It is not the hymn, but the tune, that gained the popularity. Dykes is a great master.” Yet Dykes’s tune today is considered too Victorian. The Methodists and Baptists have dropped it altogether. Nearly every other book gives an alternative setting. The Canadians are offered two, the Presbyterians three; but the one that seems winning is Purday’s *Sandon*, which is given in *Ancient and Modern* and *Ancient and Modern Revised*, in *Congregational Praise*, the Methodist, Presbyterian and Baptist books, and in the Irish, Canadian and American ones.

CHAPTER XX

JACOB'S DREAM

Nearer, my God, to Thee

A.M.; E.H.; S.P.; A.M.R.; Meth.; Presb.; Cong.; Cong.P.; Bp.; Irish; Can.;
Am.

A French visitor to London wrote, "I have seen a strange sight today, a congregation of bejewelled duchesses and opulent business men proclaiming their desire for stony griefs and even for crucifixion! What hypocrites the English are!" The words "stony griefs" give a clue to the hymn they had been singing. And many, one fears, sing these lines with as little thought of their meaning!

Their authoress, Sarah Adams, was a beautiful young poetess, a friend of Browning, who is said to have had her sprightliness in mind when he wrote *Pippa Passes*. Leigh Hunt described her as "a rare mistress of thought and tears." Her long poem, *Vivia Perpetua*, a dramatic picture of the persecution of the Early Christians, was highly praised by critics. Like her journalist father, who had been imprisoned in Newgate for attacks on Tory politicians, she was a keen Radical, and wrote many songs for the Anti-Corn-Law Movement. In Religion she was a Unitarian. She married an

engineer, who was a prolific inventor in the early days of railways. Many of his gadgets are still in use on every railroad; but he had no head for business, and his factory for railway plant went bankrupt. Sarah was encouraged by Macready to go on the stage. She played Lady Macbeth in London with success, and friends foretold a brilliant future. But, when she went to Bath to act, she broke down with hæmorrhage of the lungs, and doctors warned her that she must never act again. Her hymn was the cry of a bitterly disappointed woman on whom disaster after disaster had fallen. But how devout a cry!

The first verse with its line, “E’en though it be a cross that raiseth me,” was possibly suggested by one of the Roman martyrs’ stories that she had been studying for *Vivia Perpetua*. A soldier mockingly said, as he nailed one of them to a cross, “We will lift you a little nearer your God”; and the martyr replied, “True, you are raising me nearer than you think.”

This gave the hymn its refrain, “Nearer to Thee,” and also its central thought, that things that are hard to bear may bring us closer to God. The remaining verses are based on a story in Genesis. The wanderer, who dreamt of “steps unto heaven,” was of course Jacob, the ambitious young Jew, who had plotted to steal his brother’s headship of the clan, and been forced to fly from his father’s camp to escape his brother’s revenge. He had reached the mountain, where later the town of Bethel stood. “The hillside,” we are told, “is still strewn with slabs of rock, piled one on the other, which look like a giant’s staircase.” The sun went down, and the swift Eastern darkness descended, and he lay down to sleep with a stone for a pillow. As he slept, he dreamed. The grey stone terraces

stretched themselves out till they formed a stair (not a ladder) that seemed to reach the sky. Bright, celestial beings were passing up and down it. “And behold the Lord stood above it, and said, I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac. I am with thee, and I will keep thee in all places whither thou goest.”

In those primitive days Jacob probably thought that he had left his father’s God behind when he left his father’s camp, that the God of Isaac could only be worshipped at Isaac’s altar. Next morning his “waking thoughts” realized that the God of Isaac was still with him on this alien mountain. “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not.” Wherever he might roam, a way was always open between himself and Heaven. So he set up the stone that had been his pillow as a Rock of Remembrance, and he named that place Beth El, which means “the House of God.” All through the later books of the Old Testament we find this treated as a sacred spot.

Sarah Adams remembered this story when all her hopes crashed, and she prayed that like Jacob her troubles might bring her nearer to God, “e’en though it be a cross that raiseth me.” She was thinking, of course, not of the Cross on Calvary, but of our Lord’s words, “If any man would come after Me, let him take up his cross daily and follow Me.” She probably knew Hervey’s lines:

E’en crosses from His sovereign Hand
Are blessings in disguise.

Hers was real poetry. Mr. Gladstone, a critic not easy to satisfy, wrote, “Jacob’s Dream is a true and very fine poem.” But we do not sing it for its literary merits. It owes its

popularity to the fact that its ten-times repeated refrain, “Nearer to Thee,” finds an echo in many hearts. In one sense God is our nearest Neighbour. No one can be nearer than He. “Closer is He than breathing, nearer than hands or feet.” But we feel our need of a clearer consciousness of His Presence.

Even in savage bosoms
There are longings, yearnings, strivings
For the good they comprehend not;
And the feeble hands and helpless
Grope out blindly in the darkness,
Touch God’s Right Hand in the darkness,
And are lifted up and strengthened.

St. Augustine felt this when he cried: “Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless, till they find rest in Thee.”

There are many different ways in which souls are drawn near to God, “on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the west three gates, on the south three gates.” But one of these is undoubtedly the Gate of Tribulation. It is worth having a hard pillow, if it brings visions of God. Another hymnist, who also remembered Jacob’s dream, has said:

The trials that beset you,
The sorrows ye endure,
What are they but the ladder
Set up to Heaven on earth?

Sarah Adams develops this thought. She seems to have caught something of the spirit of her friend Browning, who wrote:

Then welcome each rebuff
That turns earth's smoothness rough.

Like the Psalmist she could say, "It is good for me that I have been in trouble."

Many stories are told of the part this hymn has played in other lives. During the Civil War an American Bishop had his house and possessions burnt. He tells how he was riding along, feeling pretty miserable, when he heard through the door of a log cabin an old woman's cracked voice singing, "Out of my stony griefs Bethel I'll raise." This was the message he needed. He resolved to let his disaster draw him nearer to God.

The name of the tune in *Ancient and Modern* suggests another kind of cross. Horbury is a village near Wakefield. Dr. Dykes, the composer, had long been feeling that he ought to go there to make a confession. When at last he got it over, he experienced a wonderful feeling of relief. As he sat at a piano he remembered this hymn, and he composed the tune, and called it *Horbury* in memory of that day.

But it was a dance band that made this hymn world-famous. When the *Titanic*, the largest ship afloat, struck an iceberg in mid-Atlantic, and sixteen hundred passengers came face to face with death, survivors told how the band stopped its rag-time and played "Nearer, my God, to Thee," as the ship sank.

The hymn was printed in 1841 for use in Sarah Adams's Unitarian Chapel, and set to a tune composed by her sister. Both words and tune then found their way into other hymnals. Dykes' *Horbury* appeared in *Ancient and*

Modern in 1859, and inaugurated, so Bishop Frere says, the nineteenth-century type of hymn-tune. This is now passing out of fashion. Dearmer, though he had used *Horbury* in the *English Hymnal*, describes it in *Songs of Praise Discussed* as “crawling sentimentality.” Sullivan’s *Proprior Deo*, written for *Church Hymns* in 1874, has been adopted by the Presbyterians and the Baptists. The American book gives Lowell Mason’s *Bethany* without any alternative. This is said to have been the tune played on the *Titanic*. *Congregational Praise* gives two alternatives.

CHAPTER XXI

FAST FALLS THE EVENTIDE

Abide with me; fast falls the eventide

A.M.; E.H.; S.P.; A.M.R.; Meth.; Presb.; Cong.; Cong.P.; Bp.; Irish; Can.; Am.

The tiny Scottish village of Ednam near Kelso has produced two poets whose verses everyone knows: James Thomson, who wrote “Rule, Britannia,” and Henry Francis Lyte, who wrote “Abide with me.” Lyte went to Trinity College, Dublin, where three years running he won the University prize for an English poem. After curacies in Ireland and Cornwall he became in 1823 Perpetual Curate of the fishing township of Lower Brixham in Devon, with its smelly streets, its harbour full of trawlers, and sea-gulls ever fighting for the refuse thrown from the boats. Here he remained for twenty-four years. During this time he continued to write verses, and published three volumes of religious poems, several hymns from which have passed into common use, for example, “Praise, my soul, the King of Heaven,” “Pleasant are Thy courts above,” and “Far from my heavenly home.” But he hoped to do better still, and in one of his poems he prayed:

If I might leave behind

Some blessing for my fellows, some fair trust
To guide, to cheer, to elevate my kind
When I am in the dust,
O Thou, Whose touch can lend
Life to the dead, Thy quickening grace supply,
And grant me, swanlike, my last breath to spend
In song that may not die.

Perhaps these lines started the legend about his last hymn. *The Historical Edition of Hymns Ancient and Modern* says: “At the age of fifty-two Lyte was dying of consumption. On a Sunday in September he ministered to his flock at Brixham for the last time, and in the evening of the same day he placed in the hands of a relative the hymn ‘Abide with me’ with an air of his composing adapted to the words.” This may be verbally correct, for it is based on a statement by his daughter. No doubt he gave a copy of his hymn to his sister-in-law that evening. But it does not follow that he had just written it.

Nevertheless many pathetic pictures have been drawn of the dying man pacing Brixham sands for the last time as the evening shadows fell, and composing, not only the hymn, but a tune to which it could be sung. One writer says: “Late that evening he set out for a lonely stroll along the sands. In that moonlit walk beside the waves memory rushed back to past years. The moon hid herself behind dense clouds, and the light was fast failing. It all wove itself in his mind into a set of verses. Hastening back to his study he wrote out the stanzas that had swept into his soul.” Polished verse is not produced as easily as that.

As a matter of fact the hymn seems to have been begun in Ireland twenty-seven years before, when Lyte was still a curate. He had spent the afternoon with a dying friend, who kept murmuring, "Lord, abide with me." These words haunted Lyte, and that evening, remembering how the two disciples at Emmaus on the Sunday after Easter had asked the Risen Lord, "Abide with us, for it is toward evening," he composed the first draft of his hymn, and gave it to the sick man's brother. From time to time he revised this. The words "When other helpers fail" date from a time when the Plymouth Brethren Movement swept Devon. An ex-member of his choir has said: "We were deeply attached to him. He had the most winning manner possible. Yet I suppose we caused him more grief than all his ill-health. Some Plymouth Brethren visited Brixham and persuaded ten of us to join them. We went in a body to Mr. Lyte and told him that we must leave his Church. He took it calmly, though we constituted his entire choir, and said that he would not try to stand between us and our consciences. We never entered his Church again. But, when 'Abide with me' was printed, and each of us was given a copy, we realized more keenly than anyone else the meaning of the words, 'When other helpers fail.'" His Sunday School teachers also left him and joined the Brethren's meeting. It was no doubt a final revision of his hymn that his sister-in-law received as a parting gift on the Sunday before he left England for Nice, never to return.

Brixham is proud of its singing. A local song runs:

In Brixham's town so rare
For singing sweet and fair
None can with us compare;

We bear the bell.

So in 1847, when news arrived of his death, the hymn was printed as a handbill for local distribution, and Brixham, we may hope, sang it; but the outside world did not hear of it till 1850, when Lyte's daughter published his *Remains*, and included it in them. It gradually found its way into almost every hymnal; till long before the end of the century in any vote on Favourite Hymns "Abide with me" always appeared among the first half-dozen. Vast crowds have sung it at Cup Finals at Wembley and at the close of Aldershot Tattoos. Clara Butt declared that none of her songs ever moved her audiences so deeply. And still no hymn seems to appeal more profoundly to the average congregation. Nurse Cavell repeated it as she waited for execution, and she faced the firing squad with the words, "Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's dark shadows flee."

But, though so familiar, this hymn is by no means always sung with understanding. Most hymn-books persist absurdly in treating it as an evening hymn. Even *Ancient and Modern Revised* has left it in this section. Yet, apart from the metaphor in the opening line, it does not contain the slightest allusion to the close of the natural day. The fast-falling eventide, of which it speaks, is the evening of life, the approach of death. "Swift to its close ebbs out *life's* little day." "Hold Thou Thy Cross before my closing eyes," "Heaven's morning breaks and earth's vain shadows flee." The singer is not preparing for bed but for death.

More excusable is it to miss the allusion to the Easter story, though Lyte by repeating in every verse the prayer of the

disciples at Emmaus evidently meant us to remember it. It is the Risen Christ, so close but often unrecognized, Whom we invoke. It is the Conqueror of Death to Whom we appeal, when we see that death awaits us.

Even to the word “abide” we do not always give its full meaning. *The Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels* says, “The leading idea of the Greek verb is that of steadfast continuance.” In one of the verses that have dropped out of the hymn Lyte prays, “Come not to sojourn, but abide with me.”

Three of his verses are omitted in most hymnals, though they contain fine lines; for example:

Come not in terrors as the King of Kings,
But kind and good with healing in Thy wings;

or again,

Thou hast not left me, oft as I left Thee.
On to the close, O Lord, abide with me.

One curious alteration appears in almost every book. In his original manuscript Lyte wrote quite clearly, “Speak [not shine] through the gloom.” He asked for more than a gleam of light. He prayed to hear his Lord’s voice. Who made the change seems to be unknown.

But the point that most singers fail to grasp is the terrific urgency of the words. Dr. Phillips said truly in *Hymnody Past and Present*: “The almost agonized sense of the dependence of the human soul on God that inspired

‘Abide with me’ means little to many who enjoy singing it in Church or elsewhere.”

Lyte’s own tune for his hymn has long been superseded by one composed by Monk, the Musical Editor of *Ancient and Modern*. This is said to have been written in ten minutes in a room in which a child was having a music lesson. He modestly put *Troyte’s Chant* in his book as the first tune, only adding his own *Eventide* as a possible alternative. But *Eventide* has been universally adopted. In the recent rather absurd reaction against all Victorian music some books like *Songs of Praise* have offered high-brow substitutes; but it will be many years before ordinary congregations consent to sing these words to any tune but Monk’s.

CHAPTER XXII
A CALL TO BATTLE
Stand up! stand up for Jesus!

A.M.; E.H.; S.P.; A.M.R.; Meth.; Presb.; Cong.; Cong.P.; Bp.; Irish; Can.;
Am.

Behind this hymn lies a tragedy. In 1854 a young Anglican clergyman, Dudley Atkins Tyng, was Rector of the Church of the Epiphany in Philadelphia. America still tolerated slavery. In the Southern States over four million negro slaves were working, often beneath the lash, for eighteen hours a day. An owner needing cash could sell his slave's wife or child by auction. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which was published in 1852, gives a vivid picture of American life at this period. And hardly anyone regarded this state of affairs as wrong. Even the Churches defended it, saying that Abraham kept slaves and that Africans were doomed to perpetual slavery by some mysterious curse which Noah laid upon Ham. An auctioneer's handbill still exists which offers for sale the property of a leading church official. Two successive items run:

A library, largely theological.
Nine slaves, very prime.

Tyng felt convinced that this was outrageous, that no Christian had any right to keep a brother in bondage. He preached boldly Sunday after Sunday that slave-holding was sin. This naturally gave deep offence to the slave-owners in his congregation, and they forced him to resign. His friends then hired the Jaynes Hall for him, the largest in the city, and he held his Services there. One Sunday he preached to five thousand men from the text, "Go now, ye that are men, and serve the Lord," and more than a thousand of them signed a pledge to enlist in God's service. On the following Wednesday he went into a barn, where a mule was working a winnower. While patting its neck, his sleeve caught in the cogs, and his arm was torn from its socket. He died of the shock.

Before he died he asked a friend, George Duffield, a Presbyterian Minister, to take his place at a Y.M.C.A. meeting at which he had promised to speak. Duffield asked, "What message would you like to send them?" The dying man replied, "Tell them to stand up for Jesus." He was thinking of a verse in the Ninety-fourth Psalm, in which God asks: "Who will stand up for Me?" Possibly he had meant to make this text the key-note of his address. Duffield passed on his friend's last message, and then recited some verses that he had composed to hammer home the meaning. He never dreamt that his lines would reach anyone outside that hall. We should never have known them, if his Sunday School superintendent had not borrowed the manuscript, and printed copies for the children to sing. One of these was reprinted in a local newspaper, and there it caught the eye of the editor of a new American hymn-book. Today it is found in almost every hymnal in the English-speaking world. One verse

however is left out, the one that refers to the circumstances under which the hymn was written:

Stand up! Stand up for Jesus!
Each soldier to his post.
Close up the broken column,
And shout through all the host,
Make good the loss so heavy
In those that still remain,
And prove to all around you
That death itself is gain.

“Who will stand up for Me?” There are many ways of answering this call. If the average church-goer were asked, “What is the message of this hymn?” he would probably say, “It is a call to Christians to show their colours.” It is. And we need stirring up on this point. No religious person on earth is so shy about disclosing his faith as a British Christian. The Hindu tattoos on his forehead the symbol of his God. The Moslem at the hour of prayer will unroll his prayer-mat in a crowded railway carriage and without the least embarrassment kneel down and say his prayers. But among a bunch of Britons it is generally impossible to guess which of them claims to be a Christian.

An American preacher announced this hymn with the comment, “That means, Don’t be a copperhead.” To an English congregation this would not be very explanatory. A copperhead is an American snake that always hides under stones. So it is American slang for a fellow who likes to lie low and not commit himself to either side. There are too many copperheads in the Christian Church, men

and women who are Christian at heart, but don't want anyone to know it. When the Book of Revelation describes the death struggle between the followers of the Beast and the followers of the Lamb, it notes one marked distinction. The servants of the Beast were allowed to wear his mark on the palm of their hands, where it was easy to conceal it. The servants of the Lamb had to wear His mark on their foreheads.

This hymn reminds Christians that they are standard-bearers. "Lift high the royal banner." Duffield remembered the text, "Thou hast given a banner to them that fear Thee, that it may be displayed." A banner is something to be displayed. There are many ways in which we can show our colours; but there can be little doubt which was the particular way that was in Tyng's mind. To him "Stand up for Jesus" meant "Join the Anti-Slavery Campaign. Throw in your lot with the most unpopular movement of the day, because you know that it stands for something that Jesus stands for. It stands for Justice. It stands for Brotherhood. It stands for Freedom. Did not our Lord declare that He was sent to set the oppressed at liberty and to bid the prisoners go free?"

The anti-slavery battle has been won, let us hope for all time; but there are plenty of other evils in the world that are contrary to Christ's will. And still, as in America a hundred years ago, the Church dithers and falters, and shrinks from leading an all-out attack on them for fear of offending rich supporters or getting entangled in politics. This hymn is a trumpet-call to Christians to be fighters, to throw caution to the winds. "Forth to the mighty conflict." Their duty is to make a new world, not to pickle the old. "Everything," wrote Péguy, "begins in Mysticism, but it has

to end in Politics.” Religion isn’t hymn-singing. Religion isn’t sermon-sampling. Religion is action.

Where’er ye meet with evil,
Within you or without,
Charge for the God of Battles,
And put the foe to rout.

It won’t be easy work. Evil is deeply entrenched. It is a task altogether beyond unaided human strength. “The arm of flesh will fail you.” But God has placed within your reach all that you need for the battle.

Put on the Gospel armour.
Each piece put on with prayer.

The reference of course is to the metaphor of the Christian’s equipment in the Epistle to the Ephesians. Let Faith be your shield, and Righteousness your body-armour, and Truth your girdle, and Readiness to publish the Gospel of Peace the special feature of your feet. And then you will find it true, “He always wins who sides with God.”

From victory unto victory
His army shall He lead
Till every foe is vanquished.

When this hymn was written the Anti-Slavery Movement seemed a forlorn hope; yet within a few years every slave was free. And greater victories lie ahead, when Christ’s People will respond to His call.

The tune *Morning Light* to which this hymn is almost always sung was borrowed from a secular song-book, where it was set to a children's poem, "'Tis dawn, The lark is singing."

CHAPTER XXIII

LUTHER'S HYMN

*A safe Stronghold our God is still
God is a Stronghold and a Tower.*

A.M.; E.H.; S.P.; A.M.R.; Meth.; Presb.; Bp.; Cong.; Cong.P.; Irish; Can.;
Am.

By the middle of the nineteenth century a new tributary had begun to swell the stream of English hymnody. Queen Victoria's marriage to a German made everything German fashionable. No young lady's education was complete till she took lessons in German. And Germany was the land of hymn-singing. Calvin had frowned on hymns, but Luther loved them. He wrote them himself and encouraged others to follow his example. Indeed Coleridge declared, "Luther did as much for the Reformation by his hymns as by his translation of the Bible." The *Dictionary of Hymnology* asserts that German hymns number today at least 100,000, of which 10,000 are well known, and 1,000 have become classics. John Wesley had translated a few of these; but it was four Victorian ladies, Miss Borthwick, Miss Cox, Miss Campbell, and Miss Winkworth, who enriched our hymnals with a host of tuneful "translations from the German."

The greatest however of German hymns, *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*, was written, both words and tune, by Luther himself. Frederick the Great called this “God Almighty’s Grenadier March.” Heine described it as “the Marseillaise of the Reformation.” It has been translated into fifty-three languages, and at least sixty-five translations into English exist. Most English and Scottish books have chosen Thomas Carlyle’s rugged version, though Ireland and America prefer others. A pleasing one by Miss Wordsworth appeared in the Second Supplement of *Ancient and Modern*, but the *Revised Edition* has reverted to Carlyle’s.

Who was Luther? In 1517 the Pope was rebuilding St. Peter’s at Rome regardless of cost; and a great campaign had been launched for the sale of Indulgences. These in theory merely remitted penances imposed by a Priest. Before receiving Absolution you were told, let us say, to make a pilgrimage to a dozen shrines; but in certain cases you could buy an Indulgence which let you off this penance. Now an army of wandering salesmen was sent throughout Europe with orders to sell as many Indulgences as they could. Many had the mentality of mere hawkers, who found that they obtained the best financial results by painting blood-curdling pictures of Hell, and then offering their parchments as infallible passports to Heaven guaranteed by the Pope himself.

Many Catholics must have been shocked by this cheap-jackery. But the only one who did anything was Martin Luther, a theological lecturer at the German University of Wittenberg. He nailed a protest against this Indulgence-hawking on to the door of the University Church. When the Pope excommunicated him, he burnt the Papal Bull

outside the city gate. When he was summoned to Worms to answer for his conduct before the Emperor and the Papal Legate and all the Princes of Germany, and all his friends urged him to hide, his answer was: “I would go, were there as many Devils in Worms as there are tiles on its housetops.” When he arrived and was ordered to retract what he had written, he replied: “Till I have been confuted by proofs from Scripture or by fair argument I cannot and will not recant. Here I stand. I can do no other. So help me God.”

About Luther’s theology and Luther’s politics and Luther’s personal character controversies have been endless; but no one has ever denied his utter fearlessness. To be burnt at the stake is a distinctly unpleasant form of death; and in those days that was the fate of all who dared to protest against the doings of the Papal Court. When Luther was a boy, Savonarola had been burnt at Florence. Ten years after Luther’s death Archbishop Cranmer died at the stake in Oxford. And Luther knew that every step he took brought him nearer to the same fate.

Whence came this amazing courage? His hymn gives the answer. It is based on the Forty-sixth Psalm, that splendid Jewish affirmation of absolute confidence in Jehovah: “God is our Refuge and Strength, a very present Help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, even though”—and here the Psalmist tries to think of the most terrifying experience that imagination could conceive—“even though the mountains should be cast into the midst of the sea.” By this bold hyperbole he proclaims that, whatever happens, nothing can shake his faith. Luther felt the same unflinching trust in God. He thought of those impregnable

castles on the Rhine, that had been besieged again and again and never captured, and he felt as safe in God's keeping as if he were inside the walls of one of them. The three best known translations of his hymn begin:

A mighty Fortress is our God.
A safe Stronghold our God is still.
A Tower of strength our God doth stand.

Like Moses, Luther "endured as seeing Him Who is invisible."

In the second verse he passes from the Old Testament to the New. Though some of the Princes of Germany were eager to protect him, he will not sanction any appeal to the sword:

With force of arms we nothing can;
Full soon were we downtrodden.

His favourite text was, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." Two words in Carlyle's version call for a note in passing. He makes Luther say that his whole hope rested on "the Proper Man," Whom God had sent to fight for us. Carlyle came from north of the Tweed, where men speak of "a proper daredevil" or "a proper rogue," meaning someone whose daring or roguery is beyond a shadow of doubt. And "the Proper Man," which is an exact translation of Luther's *der rechte Mann*, means One Whose manhood and manliness no one could dispute. But He is also "the Lord Sabaoth's Son." "Sabaoth," which comes again in the *Te Deum*, is the Hebrew word usually translated "of Hosts." This True Man's Father is Lord of all the Heavenly Hosts.

He, and no other one,
Shall conquer in the battle.

Cromwell once made the House of Commons sing Luther's hymn. (Bishop Coverdale had made a translation of it.) It was the opening of his Second Parliament, and he was surrounded by dangers. England was at war with Spain and the Dutch. At home many determined groups, Royalists on one side and Republican extremists on the other, were plotting to murder him. Dozens of desperadoes were skulking about with pistols in their pockets, eager to earn the £500 a year which the exiled King had promised to any successful assassin. But he laid his plans before the House and said: "I beseech you, set your hearts to this work. And, if you set your hearts to it, sing Luther's Psalm. That is a rare Psalm for Christians. If Pope and Spaniard and Devil all set themselves against us, though they compass us about, the Lord of Hosts is with us."

To Luther there was danger even more alarming than Emperor or Pope. He was a man of the sixteenth century, not of the twentieth, and like many in those days he was pathologically sensitive to the presence of the Devil. He complained that, whenever he tried to study, the Devil made noises in the chimney "like someone heaving down coals." Once he thought he saw the Devil grinning at him in a corner, and threw his inkpot at him. He told his students, "Wherever you are and whatever you do, the Devils are round you like wasps." This feeling of being haunted day and night by thousands of invisible foes must have been an almost intolerable strain on the nerves. But the third verse shows how he conquered it:

Were this world all devils o'er
And watching to devour us,

Christ had conquered the Devil, and Christ would protect His own. We may smile at some of Luther's fancies, but it may be that we are farther from the truth than he was. St. Paul certainly felt that he was wrestling "against spiritual wickedness in high places." The Devil is never quite so dangerous as when he's shamming dead.

But Luther was no fanatic. He did not assume that God was bound to back him up whatever he might do. He faces the possibility of disaster:

Though they take our life,
Goods, honour, children, wife,
Yet is their profit small.

God nowhere pledges Himself to save us from all misfortune. We may even have more than other folk. The symbol of Christianity is not a big umbrella but a cross. But He promises to keep us in touch with such unfailing resources, that, whatever happens, nothing can crush our spirits. We shall not be saved from tribulation, but we shall triumph over it. Luther wrote to his friend, Melanchthon, when things looked very dark: "What more can the Devil do than slay us? Why then worry, seeing that God is at the helm." That is what this hymn means by Faith.

It is a challenge to our Faith. To quote Luther once more: "The only Faith that makes a Christian is that which casts itself on God for life or death." Faith is not Faith until it is acted on. The Talmud has a legend that, when Moses threw

his rod into the Red Sea, nothing happened. It was not till the first man jumped in that the waters divided. Unless you act on your Faith, it remains fantasy. The message of this hymn is, *You can always rely on God*. Even though atomic bombs should fall—the modern equivalent to the Psalmist's phrase about the mountains being cast into the sea—you can still rely on Him. This world is not His only one.

The City of God remaineth.

CHAPTER XXIV

EASTER AT MA-SABA

Come, ye faithful, raise the strain

A.M.; E.H.; S.P.; A.M.R.; Cong.P.; Can.; Am.; R.C.

As we saw in our first chapter the earliest Christian hymns were those of the Greek Church, but thanks to the schism between East and West most of these remained unknown in England for more than a thousand years, till John Mason Neale in 1862 published his *Hymns of the Eastern Church*. He was a Fellow of Downham College, Cambridge, who through the influence of the Oxford Movement had become an enthusiast for all things medieval. He even wished to scrap all post-Reformation hymns and allow nothing to be sung in church but translations of the Latin Office Hymns set to their plainsong melodies. His extreme views made Bishops and Patrons rather afraid of him, and he was never given any preferment in the Church except the Wardenship of Sackville College, East Grinstead, an almshouse for thirty old men, where he remained for twenty years. This however allowed him plenty of time for literary work, and he poured out a continuous stream of books of amazing erudition, ranging from solid historical works like his five-volume *History of the*

Eastern Church to children's stories with which Tractarian aunts filled the shelves in their godchildren's nurseries.

Among other gifts he had a remarkable talent for versification. At Cambridge for eleven years in succession he had won the University prize for the best sacred poem. And now in spite of his disapproval of modern hymns he produced verses which were very quickly set to music. Of these the best known are "O happy band of pilgrims," "Art thou weary," "Christian, dost thou see them," and "Good King Wenceslas." But he chiefly excelled in the difficult art of translation. He not only pleaded for a revival of the ancient hymns, but made this possible by providing spirited and singable versions. We have already noticed some of his renderings from the Latin, "The Royal Banners forward go," "Alleluia, song of sweetness," "Jesu, the very thought is sweet," "O come, O come Emmanuel," and "Jerusalem the Golden." Towards the end of his life he turned his attention to hymns of the Eastern Church. Here a stupendous mass of material was waiting for exploitation. The Greek Service-books consist of 5,000 closely printed pages, of which at least 4,000 contain nothing but hymns. But translation was not easy. Greek hymns are not metrical, but are written in rhythmic prose like the *Te Deum*. And they are immensely long. Each "canon," as they are called, is divided into nine "odes," and each of these consists of varying numbers of verses. The translator must first decide which verses he means to use, and then turn them, not only into a new language, but into an entirely different metrical form. Nevertheless in this work Neale was wonderfully successful.

A good example of his skill is the Easter hymn, "Come, ye faithful, raise the strain." The writer of the Greek original was John of Damascus, who had been a high official at the Court of the Saracen Caliph; but he had withdrawn from the world and become a monk in the grim monastery of Ma-Saba. This is one of the loneliest spots in the world, perched like an eagle's nest on a crag in the Wilderness of Judaea at the edge of the gorge down which the Kedron rushes to join the Jordan. Here nothing is heard but the jackal's howl and the raven's cry. Here he wrote great theological works, which won him the title of "the Father of Scholasticism." But he also composed a number of those long prose poems, which were the nearest approach to hymns that the Greek Church permitted.

These canons had crept almost surreptitiously into the Service-books as tail-pieces to the scriptural canticle for the day, a few brief words of application added at the end. But in process of time they grew longer and longer, till at last the canticle disappeared, and only the canon was left. The one before us is a fragment from the canon for the Sunday after Easter.

The canticle for the day was the Song of Moses, the Psalm of triumph which Exodus (xv. 1-19) puts on his lips, when he had led the Israelites through the Red Sea and seen the chariots of the Egyptians overwhelmed by the waters: "I will sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously. The horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. Thy Right Hand, O Lord, is glorious in power. Thou hast led forth the people whom Thou hast redeemed. Thou shalt bring them in and plant them in the mountain of Thine

inheritance.” If John of Damascus seems to dwell unduly on this escape from Egypt—

God hath brought His Israel
Into joy from sadness;
Loosed from Pharaoh’s bitter yoke
Jacob’s sons and daughters;
Led them with unmoistened foot
Through the Red Sea waters—

it was not merely that the date of Easter coincides with the Jewish Passover. It was that he had to link his hymn on to this Old Testament canticle. But to the early Church this was in no way incongruous. To the Jews the escape from Egypt was the turning-point in their history; and to Christians Christ’s victory over death was the most important event that had ever happened. In his other Easter hymn John of Damascus returns to this thought:

From death to life eternal,
From earth unto the sky,
Our Christ has brought us over
With hymns of victory.

In his next verse he turns to a different reflection. Easter comes at Springtime, and every Religion seems to have held some kind of Festival of Rejoicing to mark the passing of Winter. The very word Easter comes from Eostre, the Anglo-Saxon Goddess of the Spring. Christians early intertwined the thought of the new life that Spring brings to Nature with the message of Christ’s Resurrection. Fortunatus, whose Hymn on the Cross we studied in an earlier chapter, in his Easter hymn exclaims:

All Nature with new birth of beauty gay
Acknowledges her Lord's return today.
The greenwood leaves, the flowering meadows tell
Of Christ triumphant over gloomy Hell.

And even in the barren Gorge of the Kedron John saw that Spring had arrived. Here and there a plucky little thorn-bush, that had managed to root itself in a crevice of the rocks, was putting forth pink blossoms, and at the foot of the ravine tufts of coarse grass were pushing their way through the stones; and he wrote:

'Tis the Spring of souls today.
All the Winter of our sins
Long and dark is flying.

In his third verse two points are worth noticing. His names for Easter, "Queen of Seasons," "Feast of Feasts," were well established by his day. They are found in the sermons of St. Gregory of Nyssa four hundred years earlier. But Neale's use of the word "Jerusalem" introduces a quite unnecessary ambiguity. Literally translated the Greek says that Easter "cheers the approved people of the Church." So his "Jerusalem" means, not the city, but the Christian Church.

The last verse in *Ancient and Modern* is entirely the composition of the compilers. Obsessed with the idea that every hymn must end in a Doxology, they inserted this, and dropped Neale's:

Neither might the gates of death,
Nor the tomb's dark portal,
Nor the watchers, nor the seal,

Hold Thee as a mortal;
But today amidst the Twelve
Thou didst stand, bestowing
That Thy peace, which evermore
Passeth human knowing.

This, with its reference to Christ's appearance to the Eleven on the evening of Easter Day and His blessing, "Peace be unto you," is an exact translation of the Greek, and is retained in every other book that uses the hymn. Curiously, *Ancient and Modern Revised* sticks to its home-made Doxology.

Three tunes are in use for this hymn, A. H. Brown's *St. John Damascene*, Sullivan's *St. Kevin*, and the traditional German air *Ave Virgo Virginum*.

CHAPTER XXV
THE FAST CLOSED DOOR
O Jesu, Thou art standing

A.M.; E.H.; A.M.R.; Meth.; Presb.; Cong.; Bp.; Irish; Can.; Am.

This hymn was inspired by a picture, Holman Hunt's *Light of the World*; but its roots lie far back in the Old Testament.

There are several rival interpretations of that obscure book, The Song of Solomon, but the most convincing is that it deals with the adventures of a kidnapped country girl in Jerusalem.

Apparently she had been decoyed from her home in the Lebanon to form one of Solomon's harem. But her shepherd lover has followed to rescue her. He knocks at her door in the night. "It is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me, my dove, for my head is wet with dew." But she is comfortably sleepy in bed, and does not feel inclined to get up. "I have put off my robe. Why should I dress again? I have washed my feet. Why should I soil them?" She is so slow in answering his call that, when she does unbar the door, he has gone. Then, realizing her loss, she rushes through the streets, trying in vain to find him.

This passage found an echo in the New Testament. St. John was writing to seven little groups of Christians in Asia Minor. For one, the Church in Laodicea, he had nothing but rebuke. Its members met regularly on Sunday, but they were smugly self-satisfied. They despised the heathen. They said, "We have need of nothing." And they had lost all their keenness, and become, like many modern congregations, languid and lukewarm. St. John tells them that their Lord was disgusted with them. "I will spew thee out of My mouth." But he adds a personal appeal to anyone in that dead Church who would listen to Christ's call. He pictures our Lord knocking, like the lover in the Song of Solomon, and saying: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone will listen to My voice and open the door, I will come in, and he shall sup with Me." Even though his Church is dead, the individual Christian can still hold communion with his Saviour.

These two word-pictures in two of the most difficult books in the Bible seem to have attracted little notice, till Holman Hunt in 1854 painted his Academy picture of Christ standing in the moonlight, knocking at a fast-closed door. He painted it in the orchard of the Rectory Farm at Ewell, and, since the motto of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, to which he belonged, was that everything must be true to Nature, he worked all night, when the moon was full, with his feet in a sack of straw. He took infinite pains over his picture, and it was a prodigious success. "For the first time in England," wrote William Bell Scott, "a picture became a subject of conversation and general interest from one end of the country to the other."

Innumerable reproductions soon made it familiar everywhere.

Here is Ruskin's interpretation of it: "On the left is seen the door of the human soul. It is fast barred. Its bars and nails are rusty. It is bound to its stanchions by creeping tendrils of ivy. A bat hovers above it. Its threshold is overgrown with brambles, nettles and fruitless corn. Christ approaches in the night as Prophet, Priest and King. The white robe represents the Prophetic power of the Spirit. The jewelled robe and breastplate represent His investiture as Priest. The Kingly Crown of gold is interwoven with the crown of thorns, not dead thorns, but bearing soft leaves for the healing of the nations. When Christ enters a human heart, He bears a twofold light, the light of conscience, which displays past sin, and the light of peace, the hope of salvation. The lantern in Christ's Hand is the light of conscience. Its fire is red and fierce. It falls on the closed door, on the weeds which encumber it, on an apple marking the awakening of conscience to hereditary guilt. The light is suspended by a chain to the wrist of Christ, showing that the reality of sin chains the Hand of Mercy. The light which proceeds from His Head on the contrary is the hope of salvation. It springs from the crown of thorns, and though subdued and full of softness is yet so powerful that it entirely melts with its glow the leaves and boughs that it crosses, showing that every earthly object must be hidden by this light."

The painter's own exposition was simpler: "The closed door was the obstinately shut mind, the weeds the cumber of daily neglect, the accumulated hindrances of sloth, the orchard the garden of delectable fruit for the dainty feast of the soul. The still, small Voice was the summons to the sluggard to awaken and become a labourer under the Divine Master. The bat, which flits only in darkness, was a symbol of

ignorance. The Kingly and Priestly dress of Christ the sign of His reign over the body and soul.” He added that in addition to the text, “Behold I stand at the door and knock,” which he painted at the foot of the picture, he also had in mind St. Paul’s words, “The night is far spent.”

Such a picture might well have tempted hymnists to underline its message, but as a matter of fact it was some time before it had this result. William Walsham How, Rector of Whittington in Shropshire and later Bishop of Wakefield, was a prolific hymn-writer. To him we owe “For all the Saints,” “To Thee, our God, we fly,” “Summer suns are glowing,” “It is a thing most wonderful,” and many another favourite. For thirteen years an engraving of the picture had hung on his study wall; but it was not till 1867 (so he tells us) that, “after reading a moving poem entitled *Brothers and a Sermon*,” he scribbled on the back of an envelope a first draft of “O Jesu, Thou art standing.” But, when it was published, it started a fashion in hymn-writing. Harriet Beecher Stowe’s “Knocking, knocking, who is there?” and Frances van Alstyne’s “Behold Me standing at the door” are two of the best of the large number of mission hymns inspired by Holman Hunt.

Nothing could be simpler or more straightforward than the message of Walsham How’s hymn. The first verse shows Jesus waiting. Why does He have to wait? One critic of the picture thought that he had caught Holman Hunt tripping. He wrote that he had forgotten to put any handle on his door. The artist replied that this was quite intentional, for the door of the heart has its handle on the inside only. An orator once said: “An Englishman’s house is his castle. The winds of heaven may whistle in at every window. The rain

may pour in by every cranny. But the King himself dare not enter it, however humble, without the owner's permission." The Risen Christ in the Easter story waited for an invitation before He entered the cottage at Emmaus. "He made as though He would have gone further. But they constrained Him, saying, Abide with us." It is for us to invite the King in, if we desire His company.

He wakes desires you never may forget.
He shows you stars you never saw before.
He makes you share with Him for evermore
The burden of the world's divine regret.
How wise you were to open not! And yet
How poor, if you should turn Him from the door.

The second verse shows Jesus knocking. A knock is a definite act, an attempt to attract attention. One of Shakespeare's most dramatic moments is when the murderers in *Macbeth* are disturbed by someone knocking at the door. No one appears. No word is spoken. But the persistent knocking is a reminder that there is an outside world, and that someone from that outside world is calling attention to his presence. The sound of a church bell, the coming of a Church season, some unexpected crisis in our lives or in the world around, may all be knocks, some gentle, some stern, to remind us that we have shut Christ out.

The last verse shows Jesus pleading. Sometimes a still small voice seems to speak to us within. A solemn thought steals across our minds for a moment. We cannot tell how or why. We may call it "the voice of conscience" or "our better nature." But to How it was the Voice of Jesus:

I died for you, My children,
And will ye treat Me so?

In one Sunday School this hymn is known as “the run-and-open-the-door hymn.” That is the kernel of its message. And it has led many to reply: “Come in, Thou blessed of the Lord. Wherefore standest Thou without?”

Dear Saviour, enter, enter,
And leave us nevermore.

The most popular tune for it is Dale’s *St. Catherine*, which is set to it in *Ancient and Modern*, *Ancient and Modern Revised*, the Irish, Canadian and Baptist books. The *English Hymnal*, which originally selected a seventeenth-century German tune, was forced by the protests of its supporters to add in its second edition *St. Catherine* in an Appendix. The Methodist and Presbyterian books choose the Welsh air, *Llangloffan*, which is also suggested as an alternative by the *English Hymnal*.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE RAINBOW AND THE RAIN

O Love that will not let me go

A.M.; A.M.R.; Presb.; Meth.; Bp.; Cong.; Cong.P.; Irish; Can.; Am.

Every hymnal except the Roman is delightfully Catholic. Christians of most diverse types, Eastern, Western and Celtic monks, Anglicans, Lutherans, Congregationalists, Methodists, Quakers, Unitarians, blend their worship harmoniously together. One group however has till now been unrepresented. That is the Mystics. But in recent years that omission has been rectified. The present hymn is pure Mysticism. George Matheson, its author, was a Scottish Presbyterian, who, though blind from childhood, was Minister, first of a church on the Clyde, then of St. Bernard's, Edinburgh. He was an impressive preacher and a prolific writer. Solid works, such as his *Aids to the Study of German Theology* and *Can the Old Faith Live with the New?* won him an Edinburgh D.D. and an LL.D. of Aberdeen; and he also produced a long series of popular devotional books, *Words by the Wayside*, *Sidelights from Patmos*, *Studies in the Portrait of Christ*, etc. All these however are now rather outmoded; but his fame rests securely on a single hymn.

Concerning this a fabulous sob-story has gained wide circulation. It says that as an undergraduate he had trouble with his eyes, and an oculist told him that he was going blind, and that nothing could save his sight. When he broke the news to the girl to whom he was engaged, she promptly returned his ring, saying that she could not be bothered with a blind husband. So that night he wrote these verses to the Love that would not let him go. A pretty story; but two dates show that it cannot be true. He lost his sight in 1860, and the hymn was not written till 1882.

He gives this account of its origin: "I was sitting alone in my study on a fine June evening in a state of deep depression, due to a real calamity. Something had happened known only to myself, which caused me the most severe mental suffering. The hymn was not written for any utilitarian purpose. It was wrung spontaneously from my heart. It was the quickest bit of work I ever did. It was finished in five minutes. It seemed at the time as if someone was dictating it to me. There was so little sense of effort that I had a sensation of passiveness. I have no natural gift of rhythm. All the other verses I have ever written are manufactured articles. This came like a dayspring from on high."

This statement is of interest to a psychologist, specially to one studying the problem of automatic writing. No hymn seems less likely to have been dashed off on the spur of the moment. Every line is tightly packed with thought and poetic imagery. Without for a moment doubting Matheson's statement that he wrote it in five minutes, its subject matter must have long lain dormant in his subconscious mind, ready to surge up to the surface at a moment of emotion. For example, an

early eighteenth-century book, much prized by Presbyterians, was Howe's *Devout Meditations*. One of its prayers runs: "Most gracious God, Who hast appointed the rivers to hasten to the sea, make the stream of my will perpetually to flow a cheerful and impetuous course, till it plunges joyfully into the unfathomable Ocean of Thy Divine Will." A memory of that passage may perhaps lie behind the first verse of the hymn:

I give Thee back the life I owe,
That in Thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.

But without an intimate knowledge of popular Scottish theology and of the phrases which Presbyterian Ministers were wont to weave into their pulpit prayers it is impossible to track down Matheson's metaphors to their source; but it seems unlikely that all were original. The unfathomable ocean of the Godhead, the flickering torch, the rainbow in the rain, may have been familiar pulpit clichés; but this does not detract from the beauty of the poem into which they are woven.

If we wipe out the story of the faithless fiancée, we are left without a clue as to what the "calamity" was that caused his "severe mental suffering." It has been suggested that it may have been a spasm of unbelief. His study of German criticism of the Bible and of the attacks which scientists like Huxley and Spencer were making on Religion may have so undermined his faith that he wondered whether he could any longer honestly minister in a Christian pulpit. This however is the merest guess. It may have been something entirely different. But, whatever it was, he found relief, as

Mystics of all ages have done, in by-passing all minor controversial questions and falling back on the fact of God and the love of God. The Incarnation, the Atonement, the Sacraments, may be manifestations of that Love, but the basic fact is the Love itself, the Love that, however our faith may fail, will never let us go.

Mysticism has been defined as “belief in the possibility of an intimate and direct union between the human spirit and Something greater than self, which can be called God.” Mystics are found in many religions, specially in India; “but,” writes Bullett in *The English Mystics*, “wherever he turns up, whether in our Christian Hemisphere or in the ancient civilizations of the East, he always tells us more or less the same thing, that he has enjoyed a sense of communion with a Reality infinitely transcending himself.” This is what Matheson meant, when he says that he hands back to God the life he had received from Him,

That in Thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.

The fourteenth-century Mystic, Tauler, testified: “The spirit is, as it were, sunk and lost in the Abyss of Deity. A man’s being is so penetrated with the Divine, that he loses himself therein as a drop of water is lost in a cask of strong wine.” “The individual soul,” says Rufus Jones in his article on Mysticism in the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, “feels invaded, vitalized with new energy, merged in an enfolding Presence, liberated and exalted with a sense of having found what it has always sought, and flooded with joy.”

In his second verse Matheson used the Torch Race in the old Greek Games as a parable. This was a Relay Race. Each competitor started with a lighted torch, which at the end of his course he had to hand on still burning to another runner. Pagan Philosophers and Christian Moralists have used this again and again to illustrate the duty of passing on to others the light we have received. Moore says in one of his poems:

'Twas like a torch-race, such as they
Of Greece performed in ages gone,
When the fleet youths in long array
Passed the bright torch triumphant on.
I saw the expectant nations stand
To catch the coming flame in turn.
I saw from ready hand to hand
The clear but struggling glory burn.

But Matheson in his trouble felt that his torch was going out. Then however he remembered the promise, "The Glory of the Lord shall be thy Rear-ward," and he turned to the Light that followed all his way, and plunged his flickering flame into the Divine Glory, that it might "brighter, fairer be." Here again we have the Mystics' message that Self must be absorbed in God.

The third verse, as Matheson wrote it, contained a startling metaphor: "I climb the rainbow in the rain." The rainbow has often been used as an emblem of Hope. And here the poet declares that, though rain comes drenching down in a depressing torrent, and his only hopes are a ladder as frail and unsubstantial as a rainbow, he will go on climbing. But, strong as this expression is, the mental picture it conjures

up of a little man soaked to the skin trying to climb a rainbow might easily provoke a laugh; so Matheson accepted a suggestion of the Scottish Hymn-book Committee, and permitted the line to be changed to “I trace the rainbow through the rain,” a weaker but in its way quite a beautiful metaphor; though troubles for the moment might freeze him to the bone like a November downpour, he saw bright colours through the deluge, and felt

the promise not in vain
That morn shall tearless be.

In the last verse most books print “cross” with a capital C. The poet was thinking, however, not of the Cross on Calvary, but of the cross which every Christian has to carry. He says that he dare not try to dodge it. One great maxim of Mysticism is the necessity of dethroning Self that God may be all in all. So he declares that he lays his earthly ambitions in the dust that from their grave crimson blossoms of sacrifice may arise, the harbingers of life everlasting.

I lay in dust life’s glory dead,
And from the ground there blossoms red
Life that shall endless be.

Several very pleasant tunes have been written for these words, including one by Sir Walford Davies in *Ancient and Modern*, but, thanks to the help of the B.B.C. which frequently broadcasts it, *St. Margaret*, written for the *Scottish Hymnal* by A. L. Pearce, Organist of Glasgow Cathedral, seems to be beating all competitors. It is found in the Congregationalist, Methodist, Baptist, Irish, Canadian and American hymnals.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE ADORATION OF THE LAMB

The Church of God a Kingdom is

A.M.; E.H.; S.P.; A.M.R.; Am.

Among modern hymns of which the meaning is by no means crystal clear is one which owes its vogue largely to its rollicking tune. “The Church of God a Kingdom is” leapt into popularity as soon as it was wedded to *University*, that gay eighteenth-century air, which got its name because it was composed by a Professor at Cambridge. Choirs and congregations love it; but ask them to decode the words, and they will probably be bewildered.

The key hangs in a church in Belgium. In 1415, while Henry V was fighting at Agincourt and Thomas à Kempis was beginning to write his *Imitation of Christ*, Josse Vyd, a wealthy burgher of Ghent, was discussing with his wife plans for presenting a new altar-piece to their parish church. The Epistle for All Saints’ Day suggested a subject. Let it be the Adoration of the Lamb. Let it illustrate the words: “A great multitude which no man could number of all nations and kindreds and people and tongues stood before the throne and

before the Lamb with palms in their hands, and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne and unto the Lamb.” He gave the commission to Hubert van Eyck, who had recently settled in the city. The picture with its three hundred separate figures took seventeen years to paint. Hubert died before it was finished, and the final touches were added by his brother Jan. But the donor saw it placed in position in 1432.

It is universally acknowledged to be one of the world’s supreme masterpieces; and though it has had strange adventures—the latest being when it was stolen by the Germans and rediscovered in a salt-mine in the Tyrol—it hangs today, where Josse Vyd placed it, in the church that has now become the Cathedral of St. Bavon. Thousands of English visitors have travelled to Ghent to study it, and one of them, L. B. Muirhead, wrote some verses on it. These his friend, Robert Bridges, the Poet Laureate, included in the *Yattendon Hymnal* which he was compiling for his village church. From this they made their way into the *English Hymnal*, into the Second Supplement of *Ancient and Modern*, into *Songs of Praise*, and then into *Hymns Ancient and Modern Revised*.

To understand the words we must remember the thought with which the painter started, the great multitude from all nations assembled to worship the Lamb; and then we must get some idea of the picture which Muirhead saw, the sermon in oils for simple folk, which the good old Flemish burgher had placed in his church five hundred years before. Towering over all is the majestic figure of Christ upon the throne. A triple crown is on His Head, a crystal sceptre in His Hand. He is four times

the size of the human pigmies in the panel below.

Round His Head is a Latin inscription: “This is God, Omnipotent in His Divine Majesty, the Greatest of All, Best of all in His perfect kindness, most Liberal of all rewarders in His infinite bounty.” On the steps of the throne are the words: “Life without death is on His Head, youth without age on His brow, joy without sorrow on His right, safety without fear on His left.” This is the “King of Tremendous Majesty,” Whom Russian icons depict. The first and most obvious message of the picture is “Christ is King! Christ reigns! Christ rules! Christ controls!” So Muirhead began his poem: “The Church of God a *Kingdom* is, where Christ in power doth reign.”

Below is a pastoral scene, a broad, green meadow fringed with trees, in the centre of which stands an altar surrounded by adoring Angels. It is covered with a crimson cloth on which is embroidered in gold: “Behold the Lamb of God Which taketh away the sins of the world.” With the crude literalism of his age the painter placed on that altar a woolly lamb, not dead but very much alive, pouring from its breast a stream of blood into a golden chalice. Muirhead describes the scene:

An altar stands within the shrine,
Whereon, once sacrificed,
Is set immaculate, divine,
The Lamb of God, the Christ.

Van Eyck then painted “glad companies of Saints” advancing towards that altar from every point of the compass. The word “Saints” slips lightly from our lips; but the artist worked hard to demonstrate how many types of men and women are

entitled to that name. He began with Old Testament Prophets, holding their books in their hands, and did not hesitate to add Pagan Philosophers like Socrates and Plato, who had taught men righteousness. From a rocky defile rides a troop of horsemen labelled “Soldiers of Christ,” among whom St. George and Charlemagne and King Arthur can be identified. A group of Hermits is led by St. Anthony, one of Pilgrims by St. Christopher; a third consists of Flemish Magistrates, who had earned the title, “the Just Judges.” There are two large companies of martyrs, the men led by St. Peter and St. Paul and St. Stephen with his stones, the girl martyrs led by St. Agnes with her lamb, St. Barbara with her tower, and St. Dorothy with her roses, all sorts and conditions of men and women coming to worship the Lamb. One small point in the picture evidently caught Muirhead’s eye. The trees on the left are northern beeches and pines, those on the right semi-tropical lemon trees and palms, and from both climates Saints are emerging. The Church is international. So he wrote that “rich and poor *from countless lands*” are finding their way to that altar, all alike “reaching forth hands to take God’s holy food.”

In front of the altar is a large stone basin with a fountain plashing into it, on which is carved: “Water of Life from the Throne of God and the Lamb.” Interpreters of the picture generally speak of this as a font, and suggest that it is there to call attention to the other great Gospel Sacrament, Holy Baptism. But, apart from the Pagan Philosophers, most of these pilgrims must have been baptized many years before. More probably the painter had in mind two texts in the Book of Revelation: “I will give unto him that is athirst of the Fountain of the Water of Life freely,”

“Whosoever will, let him take of the Water of Life freely.”
God’s Saints need constant draughts of Life to refresh them
on their march.

Another detail in the picture attracted Muirhead’s attention. That Fountain had a large bowl from which wayfarers could drink. But it also had an overflow pipe, through which water was running out on to the grass around. And, since water brings fertility, that meadow was bright with flowers. So the hymn speaks of “pure life-giving streams” overflowing the ground and causing fair blossoms to abound. Ezekiel’s promise had come true: “Everything shall live, whither the River cometh.”

Having traced the origin of the hymn from the fifteenth-century picture, now ask what meaning it can have for George Giddings, twentieth-century tractor-driving farmer and sidesman, and his jazz-loving daughter Beth, who sings in the village choir. Neither has ever seen the painting or even a reproduction of it; but the words alone impress on them the fact that they are subjects of a King, an overwhelmingly wonderful and worshipful King, Who expects His laws to be obeyed. The Church is a Kingdom, “where Christ in power doth reign.” And then they begin to feel that the little group of ploughmen and land-girls, who form the congregation at Nether Slocum, are an integral part in a vast international force, “rich and poor from countless lands,” who all pay honour to their King. Beth and her father get the thrill of belonging to a worldwide Brotherhood. Moreover the hymn reminds them that, though their King demands their obedience, He is doing all that He can to help them to obey. He supplies “holy food” for the strengthening of their souls to

all who will hold out their hands, and those everflowing streams of Life, which theologians call “grace.” So those villagers are not repeating empty jargon when they sing:

O King, O Christ, this endless grace
To us and all men bring.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE ELIXIR

Teach me, my God and King

E.H.; S.P.; A.M.R.; Presb.; Meth.; Cong.; Cong.P.; Bp.; Irish, Am.

In the twentieth century, hymnal-compilers tapped a new source of supply. In musty little volumes by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century poets devotional lyrics lay buried, which had never been set to music; but, when provided with tunes, some of these made quite useful hymns. Laud's short-lived High Church Movement under the early Stuarts had produced one group of poets, among whom was George Herbert. He belonged to a Welsh Border family, from which had sprung a long line of courtiers and soldiers. One of his brothers, Lord Herbert of Cherbury, famous fop, deadly duellist and "the Father of Deism," was British Ambassador at Paris; another was Master of the Revels at the Court of James I. And George himself, though Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, and Public Orator of the University, spent much of his time at Court, an adroit and pleasure-loving courtier, who had gained the King's favour, and hoped to be appointed one of the Secretaries of State.

But the King died, and Herbert withdrew into the country, and passed through five years of severe spiritual struggle. “He had many conflicts with himself,” writes Izaak Walton, the fisherman, his biographer, “whether he should return to the painted pleasure of the Court or betake himself to the study of Divinity.” When later he sent his friend, Nicholas Ferrar, a manuscript book of his poems, he described it as “a picture of the many spiritual conflicts that have passed betwixt God and my soul, before I could subject mine to the will of Jesus, my Master.” But Religion eventually won; and he received Deacon’s Orders. In those days this did not pledge him to a clerical life, nor did the Priesthood follow as a matter of course (Ferrar remained a Deacon till his death). In 1630 however Herbert was offered the Rectory of Bemerton, a small village near Salisbury. To accept this would necessitate Ordination as a Priest. For a time he hesitated. But Laud, who was visiting Salisbury, overcame his scruples, and then and there sent for a tailor to measure him for clerical clothes. Next day he was instituted to his living, and his Ordination followed at Embertide.

Three years later he died; but during that short incumbency his saintliness made so deep an impression, that he became regarded as the model, whom every village parson ought to emulate. “If ever two lives,” wrote Quiller-Couch, “illustrated the beauty of holiness, they were those lived by George Herbert and his wife at Bemerton.” He managed to make the Church’s ideal of Daily Worship a reality. “His practice,” says Walton, “was to appear twice every day at Church at the canonical hours of ten and four with his wife and three nieces, daughters of a deceased sister, and his whole household. And he brought, not only his own house to

serve the Lord, but most of his parishioners; and many gentlemen of the neighbourhood constantly made part of his congregation twice a day. Some of the meaner sort in his parish did so reverence Mr. Herbert, that they would let their plough rest, when he rang to Prayers, that they might offer their devotions to God with him, and then return to the plough.”

Our special interest lies however in his poems. These he sent to Ferrar from his death-bed, asking him to burn or publish them as he thought best. Ferrar at once passed them on to the Cambridge University Press. Herbert belonged to the Fantastic School of Poetry, which Donne had introduced from the Continent into England. He gave his poems odd titles, *The Quip*, *The Bag*, *The Collar*, *The Pulley*, and filled them with freakish conceits that make most of them quite unsuited for congregational singing; but several of his simpler lyrics now appear in many hymn-books. Few hymns are more filled with the spirit of joy than his “Let all the world in every corner sing”; and “Teach me, my God and King” has become a general favourite, though it is not always sung with full understanding.

He headed it *The Elixir*. An elixir was a mysterious something, which alchemists hoped, if they could find it, would turn base metals into gold. Sometimes they thought of it as a stone, the so-called philosophers’ stone, sometimes as a liquid, a tincture; and the whole point of Herbert’s poem is that three simple words, “For Thy sake”—the feeling that the most monotonous chores can be done for God’s sake—have power to transform the dullest drudgery into splendour:

This is the famous stone,
That turneth all to gold.

Nothing can be so mean,
Which with this tincture, *For Thy sake*,
Will not grow bright and clean.

This hymn gives an insight into Herbert's quiet type of godliness. The *sine qua non* of real Religion is awareness of God. So he begins his prayer:

Teach me, my God and King,
In all things Thee to see.

He had renounced the gaiety of the Court and the chance of swaying international affairs as a Secretary of State. Now he wants to see God in the life of his Wiltshire village. To him God was no august Monarch remotely throned above the skies. Bernard Shaw once said: "Beware of the man whose God is in the sky." Herbert believed, like St. Paul: "He is not far from every one of us, for in Him we live and move and have our being." Like Keble "the trivial round, the common task" were all that he needed to keep him in touch with God.

One of his illustrations shows how easy it is to overlook God. Think, he says, of a pane of glass. You may become so interested in it, you may focus your attention on it so closely, that you see nothing but the glass. Or you may look through it and see the boundless infinity of the sky:

A man that looks on glass,
On it may stay his eye,
Or, if he pleaseth, through it pass,

And then the heaven espy.

The Materialist (and this name embraces the great majority of mankind) looks on the world and sees nothing but material things, like Wordsworth's Peter Bell,

A primrose by the river's brim
A yellow primrose was to him,
And it was nothing more.

But to the occasional Saint

the meanest flower that blooms can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

And Herbert knew that this power to see God in a blade of grass was a gift to be cultivated:

Teach me, my God and King,
In all things Thee to see.

He had much in common with Keble, who also prayed:

Give me a heart to find out Thee
And read Thee everywhere.

But, whereas Keble was thinking of the beauties of Nature, Herbert was thinking of the humdrum duties of our daily work. We all strike from time to time dull patches in life, when we go on tugging at our oar, faithfully, let us hope, but without enthusiasm. The farmer grows tired of plodding on, ploughing furrow after furrow, the schoolmaster of teaching the multiplication table to

generations of restless children, the clerk of totting up endless figures about his firm's business. The days seem stale and unprofitable.

But, if these bored folk could grasp the idea that they are fellow-workers with God, helping Him to feed the world, to educate His children, to keep the world's commerce moving, then interest would revive and tedium vanish. The most commonplace things can be done to the glory of God. Like Ken, we can make our "daily stage of duty" our "morning sacrifice." Holiness consists, not in doing extraordinary things, but in doing ordinary things extraordinarily well.

Right down the ages teacher after teacher has repeated this message. Tauler, the fourteenth-century Benedictine, said: "If I were a layman, I should regard the power to make shoes as a great God-given gift, and I should try to make them better than anyone else." The nineteenth-century Jesuit, Gerard Manley Hopkins, wrote: "It is not only prayers that give God glory. Smiting on an anvil, sawing a beam, whitewashing a wall, driving horses, sweeping, scouring, gives God glory, if you do it as your duty. To lift up hands in prayer gives God glory, but a man with a dung-fork and a woman with a slop-pail give Him glory too. All things give Him glory, if you mean they should." And this was Herbert's meaning when he said that drudgery could be made divine:

Who sweeps a room as for Thy laws
Makes that and the action fine.

"Whatsoever ye do," said St. Paul, "do all to the glory of God."

This hymn has found its tune. Almost every book sets it to the traditional carol air for “A Child this day is born,” generally called *Sandys*, because it is taken from Sandys’ *Collection of Carols*, published in 1833.

CHAPTER XXIX
A SONG OF HEAVEN
My soul, there is a country

S.P.; A.M.R.; Presb.; Meth.; Cong.P.

During a terrific thunderstorm a nervous lady clutched the arm of Emerson, the American Philosopher, and cried: "Oh, Mr. Emerson, do you think this is the end of the world?" To which he replied, "Never mind, my dear, we can get on very well without it." This is what all Christians profess to believe. The climax of the Creed is its assertion that life is everlasting. The world is not essential. Some day we shall get on very well without it.

In recent years the stressing of this truth has been furiously attacked. Americans call it the Doctrine of Pie in the Sky. Even if Immortality is a fact, we are told, the less said about it the better; for it tends to make people wickedly patient with evils that should be abolished, because they are drugged with promises of a Sweet By and By. It was teaching of this type that Kingsley denounced, when he wrote, "Such Religion is Dope"; but Karl Marx, who borrowed the phrase from Kingsley, grossly exaggerated it by declaring, "All Religion is

the Dope of the People.” Ruskin laid down that no picture is perfect “without a glimpse of the sky, a suggestion of infinity”; and no view of life can be complete that is confined to this small world and ignores Eternity.

The three hundred Bishops who assembled at Lambeth in 1948 lamented in their Report “the virtual fading out of belief in a Future Life from contemporary Western consciousness,” and asserted that this “impoverishes life to a degree which it is hardly possible to exaggerate. So far from deflecting men, as is often suggested, from their social tasks, faith in Life Eternal has been the inspiration of the most heroic work in the world. Here is the ‘living hope’ that can invigorate and sustain amid the disappointments of History and the changes and chances of life. It is this which invests a man’s life with grandeur, however obscure on earth, and with its responsibility before God as the preparation for an eternal destiny.” Goethe once wrote: “That man is dead, even in this life, who has no belief in another.”

Belief in Immortality however is not peculiar to Christianity. It has been held by almost every race that has given any thought to the Future. Greek Philosophers and Egyptian Pyramid-builders, Red Indians and South Sea Islanders, Mohammedans with their Seven Heavens, Confucians with their Ancestor Worship, Buddhists with their doctrine of the Transmigration of Souls, all proclaim in one way or another, “Once alive, always alive.” But Christianity has added to this almost universal expectation certain features of its own.

One of these is the thought of Heaven as the Home in which God gathers His children round Him. What that Home will be

like it is impossible to guess. St. Paul truly said: “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things that God hath prepared for them that love Him”; yet many hymn-writers have tried to form some conception of Heaven. Bernard pictured Jerusalem the Golden; Watts sang of “sweet fields beyond the swelling flood”; and a third delightful little poem has in recent years been unearthed from the works of Henry Vaughan.

He was a seventeenth-century Welshman, a Breconshire country doctor, who rather whimsically called himself “the Silurist,” because the Silurians in Roman times had inhabited that part of Wales. He had published two volumes of secular verse, no worse and no better than those of many other poetasters of the period; but then the reading of George Herbert’s poems entirely changed his outlook. The poems in his next two books were deeply devotional. He called them *Silex Scintillans*, which he himself translated as “Sparks from a Flint,” the sparks being flashes of truth and the flint his stony heart. In the Preface he deplors that in the past he had helped to swell the “foul and overflowing stream” of lascivious verse, and added, “I do most humbly and earnestly beg that none will read” those early poems. He ascribes his conversion to “that blessed man, Mr. Herbert, whose holy life and verse gained many converts, of whom I am the least.” The change of topic revolutionized his poetry. His early verses had not been much above the average; but some of his religious ones—for example, “I saw Eternity the other night” or “They are all gone into the world of light”—touch the very highest levels of English lyric poetry.

The second *Silex*, which he published in 1655, contains his sketch of Heaven. He gives it the title, *Peace*. How this man of quiet tastes must have longed for Peace! The Civil War had begun in the year he came of age, and throughout his adult life England had known no rest. The Battle of Dunbar was fought, while the first *Silex* was being printed. When the second appeared, Royalist risings against Cromwell were breaking out all over the country. War-weary, he pictures Heaven as a place, where

above noise and danger
Sweet Peace sits crowned with smiles.

But, though he yearns for Peace, in that bellicose age he cannot help using military metaphors. If he wants to speak of the security of Heaven, he pictures it as a “fortress.” At its gate there

stands a winged sentry
All skilful in the wars.

He was thinking no doubt of the Angel with the flaming sword, who guarded the gate of Paradise to see that “there shall in no wise enter in anything that defileth or worketh abomination or maketh a lie.” The garrison consists of Angels, and “One born in a manger” commands their “beauteous files.” Milton uses the latter word, when he pictures Gabriel leading his Angels to search for the Serpent in Eden: “So saying, on he led his radiant files.”

Vaughan’s opening lines will probably be criticized, for to him Heaven is “a Country far beyond the stars.” We are told today that Heaven is not a place, but a state of

character. “Heaven” means to be something, not to go somewhere. Heaven is delight in God’s Presence. Heaven is the thrill of doing God’s Will. Heaven is a keen appreciation of all that is lovely and true. Heaven is an atmosphere of unselfish love. And this must begin on earth. Heaven is within us, more than without us. Heaven is not golden streets or gates of pearl, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. To “go to Heaven” we must take Heaven with us.

All this no doubt is true. But the human mind seems incapable of picturing Heaven without some sense of locality. If our Departed are alive, they must be somewhere. Vaughan’s lines are defensible. No one believes in a subterranean Heaven. No one believes in an earthly one. So, since stars surround this earth on every side, rightly or wrongly we have to think of Heaven as “beyond the stars,” somewhere in the vast immensity of Space.

“Ranges” is a slightly archaic word that may puzzle some singers. To “range” once meant to “wander.” Shakespeare speaks of “robbers ranging about unseen.” So our “foolish ranges” are our aimless and profitless wanderings, which the poet urges us to exchange for the peace and security of Heaven.

One point we have already touched on, when discussing “Jerusalem the Golden.” Most modern Christians, when they think of Heaven, dwell first and foremost on the joy of reunion with relations they have lost:

Oh, then what raptured greetings
On Canaan’s happy shore!

That was not always the case. To St. Paul his first thought was that he would be with Christ. To be “absent from the body” is to be “present with the Lord.” “To depart,” he wrote, “and be with Christ is far better.” The Lord had promised, “Where I am, there shall my servant be.” “I will receive you unto Myself, that, where I am, there ye may be also.” This to many hymn-writers would be the supreme joy of Heaven. Bernard had written:

He, Whom now we trust in
Shall then be seen and known.

Five hundred years later Baxter cried:

My knowledge of that life is small;
The eye of faith is dim.
But 'tis enough that Christ knows all.
And I shall be with Him.

And Vaughan dwells on this theme:

He is thy gracious Friend,
And (O my soul, awake!)
Did in pure love descend
And die here for thy sake.
Leave then thy foolish ranges,
For none can thee secure,
But One, Who never changes,
Thy God, thy Life, thy Cure.

This hymn seems settling down to the tune which Melchior Vulpius wrote in 1609 for *Christus der ist mein Leben*, though strangely enough every book calls it by a different

name, Vulpius, Bremen, Pastor, etc. Dearmer calls it “a lovely tune permeated with a feeling of gentle serenity, yet with a deep undercurrent of emotional significance. A perfect tune for the poem.” The Presbyterians however sing it to the tune of the Cherry Tree Carol.

CHAPTER XXX

THE PILGRIM SONG

Who would true valour see

A.M.; E.H.; S.P.; A.M.R.; Meth.; Presb.; Cong.; Cong.P.; Bp.; Am.

Bunyan's Pilgrim Song is another example of old words that have only recently been set to music. He wrote them more than 270 years ago, and inserted them in the second edition of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. They were possibly suggested by Shakespeare's song in *As You Like It*:

Who doth ambition shun
And loves to lie in the sun,
Come hither, come hither;

for Bunyan confesses that in his unregenerate youth he had loved to sing carnal songs in the alehouses. But he never imagined that his verses would ever be used as a hymn. In his day he and his fellow-Baptists were in the thick of a bitter "Controversie as to Singing," "Should there be any singing in God's House? And, if so, what should be sung?" Bunyan took the line that singing in public worship was a divine ordinance,

but he firmly maintained that nothing ought to be permitted but Metrical Psalms.

Later, when hymn-singing became general, the curious iambic metre of his song, which would not fit any ordinary tune, kept hymnal-compilers from using it. But one day in 1904, when Vaughan Williams was in Sussex, he heard a ploughman from the hamlet of Monk's Gate singing an old folk-song, "Our Captain calls all hands aboard." The words were worthless, but the air was attractive; and it dawned upon him that with a slight alteration it would fit Bunyan's lines. He named it *Monk's Gate*.

He was then helping Percy Dearmer to edit *The English Hymnal*. Dearmer however hesitated to print the words as Bunyan wrote them:

Who would true valour see, let him come hither.
Here one will constant be, come wind, come weather.

He declared that no true pilgrim would show such a braggart spirit. "To ask," he wrote, "the congregation of St. Ignotus, Erewon Park, to invite us all to come and look at them, if we wish to see true valour, would be difficult." So he substituted the lines:

He who would valiant be 'gainst all disaster,
Let him in constancy follow the Master.

His criticism however sprang from imagining that Bunyan had put these words on to the lips of one of his characters, Mr. Valiant-for-Truth. But this is not the case. Bunyan added them to his Second Edition as a sort of *N.B.*, a message from

himself to his readers: “Please pay Special attention to Mr. Valiant-for-Truth, if you want to see the kind of Courage that is essential to the Christian character.” So *Ancient and Modern* and all later books (except *Songs of Praise*, of which Dearmer was also the editor, and the *American Hymnal*) have reverted to Bunyan’s lines.

Another word at which Dearmer jibbed was “hobgoblin”—“Hobgoblin nor foul fiend can daunt his spirit.” He protested that the Bible does not recognize the existence of hobgoblins; they belong to the mythology of Fairyland. So he watered down Bunyan’s fine rugged line to: “Since, Lord, Thou dost defend us with Thy Spirit.” Even *Ancient and Modern* has changed the stuttery “hobgoblin” into “goblin.” But, as we shall see, Bunyan’s word exactly expresses the truth he wished to suggest.

To enjoy this hymn it is by no means necessary to be an expert in all the minor details of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*; but it is a help, if we remember who Mr. Valiant-for-Truth was. He is one of the most attractive of Bunyan’s pilgrims. Though born in Darkland, as soon as he heard about Christian’s pilgrimage he resolved to be a pilgrim too. His parents “used all means imaginable to persuade him to stay at home”; but he overcame every obstacle. “I believed, and therefore I came out. I got into the Way. I fought all that set themselves against me.” And, when we first meet him, his face is covered with blood. He is a picture of the type of man who will not let any obstacle stop him, when once he feels sure that he sees the right goal. Bunyan says:

Forget not Mr. Valiant-for-the-Truth,

That man of courage, though a very youth,
Tell everyone his spirit is so stout,
No man can ever make him face about.

He is the unflinching Fid. Def., Defender of the Faith.
To him Untruth in all its forms is an enemy to be
fought and conquered. “No lion can him fright. He’ll with a
giant fight.” And the hymn exhorts us all to be pilgrims
militant like him.

Then we reach the Hobgoblin. This was a favourite word with
Bunyan. He tells us that in the Valley of the Shadow
“hobgoblins made a continual howling.” Mr. Valiant-for-Truth
speaks of the Valley as “the place where the hobgoblins are.”
Timid Mr. Fearing shrieks, “Oh, the hobgoblins will have me!
the hobgoblins will have me!” Bunyan knew of course, as
well as we do, that hobgoblins do not exist. But he wanted a
word that would suggest fears that have no foundation.
Millions make themselves miserable with utterly baseless
worries, fears that are every bit as absurd as fear of a
hobgoblin.

Whoso beset him round
With dismal stories
Do but themselves confound.

But from all who have caught the true pilgrim spirit these
unwholesome “fancies flee away.” How often the words come
true: “Fear knocked at the door. Faith opened it. And—there
was nothing there!”

This hymn is inserted in the story at an interesting point.
Fighters for Truth cannot avoid controversy, and

controversialists are exposed to three special dangers. Valiant-for-Truth has just emerged, wounded but victorious, from a struggle at Deadman's Corner. Three gangsters, Wildhead, Inconsiderate, and Pragmatic, have tried to compel him to throw in his lot with them. Controversialists are sometimes tempted to join hands with the Wildheads, the fanatics, the people with bees in their bonnets, who prejudice every sensible person against their cause. Sometimes they follow the lead of the Inconsiderates, who show no consideration for other people's feelings. You can't travel far by treading on other people's toes. Sometimes they become Pragmatics, argumentative, dictatorial bores, for ever laying down the law. Those who join one of these gangs become useless as champions of Truth. But Valiant-for-Truth resisted these temptations so firmly, that for the rest of the pilgrimage that tiresome old dodderer, Mr. Despondency, became his special care, and Christiana entrusted her children to him when she died.

We cannot expect every singer of this hymn to remember all these details; but its two main lessons are clear. The Christian life is a pilgrimage. This metaphor of St. Peter's is a great favourite with hymn-writers, "O happy band of pilgrims," for example, or Faber's chorus about "the pilgrims of the night." Bunyan bids us resolve "to labour night and day to be a pilgrim." Like Mr. Valiant-for-Truth Christians should be always on the move, every day leaving Darkland a little farther behind, every day advancing nearer and nearer to perfection. Good is good, but better is better. What is good enough for today is always too bad for tomorrow. No one can claim to be a pilgrim unless he is making progress.

And the second lesson of the hymn is that pilgrimage needs courage. No coward can be a Christian. He will have to face real dangers—“No lion can him fright.” He will have to learn to laugh at imaginary ones—no hobgoblin “can daunt his spirit.” He will have to ignore mockery—“He’ll not fear what men say.” Those whom discouragement cannot discourage are always the sure winners.

There’s no discouragement
Shall make him once relent
His first avowed intent
To be a pilgrim.

Valiant-for-Truth’s death-scene is an oft-quoted passage from *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. Bernard Shaw asked that it should be read aloud at his cremation. When the summons came, Bunyan’s bonny fighter said to his friends, “Though with great difficulty I have got hither, yet now I do not repent me of all the troubles I have been at to arrive where I am. My sword I give to him that shall succeed me in my pilgrimage, and my courage and skill to him that can get it. My marks and scars I carry with me to be a witness for me that I have fought His battles, Who now will be my rewarder.” Then his story concludes: “When the day that he must go hence was come, many accompanied him to the riverside, into which as he went he said, ‘Death, where is thy sting?’ And, as he went down deeper, he said, ‘Grave, where is thy victory?’ So he passed over, and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side.” The trumpets are reserved for those whose scars prove that they have fought a good fight.

Since the Pilgrim's Song became popular many musicians have composed tunes for it; but none of these seems likely to oust *Monk's Gate* from its well-deserved popularity.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE DIVINE INDWELLING

God be in my head

A.M.; S.P.; A.M.R.; Meth.; Cong.P.; Am.

This is another example of old words turned into a hymn with the help of a modern tune. The prayer itself was published in 1558. Before the Reformation the Latin Services were complicated and hard to follow. So the laity were encouraged to take to church with them a small book of private devotions, called *The Primer*. This was sometimes in English and sometimes in Latin. It contained a number of Psalms, the Hours of the Virgin, the Litany, the Prayers for the Dead, and also some miscellaneous devotions that varied from edition to edition. It was constantly revised and reissued from century to century and from diocese to diocese, and the last edition to be printed was *The Sarum Primer* of 1558. This had a very short life. A few months after it appeared, Queen Mary died and Elizabeth came to the throne, and Protestantism triumphed. It was the last flicker of the old Catholic books of devotion; but it contained one prayer, “God be in my head,” which the staunchest Protestant could not object to.

Very few copies of the book were sold, and the prayer remained unnoticed till 1908, when Dr. Strong, who was then Dean of Christ Church, Oxford, found one of these *Primers* in his college library. He was struck by the words, and inserted them in *The Oxford Hymn Book*, which he was editing, and composed a tune for them. This however never became popular, though *Ancient and Modern* included it in its Second Supplement. But in 1912 Sir Walford Davies gave it a new tune for the London Choirs' Festival. This found its way into *The Fellowship Hymn Book*, and *The Students' Hymn Book*, and then into *The Methodist Hymn Book*, from which it spread from hymnal to hymnal, till it has made this long-forgotten prayer the property of the Church Universal.

The words could hardly be simpler. They are based on the Doctrine of the Divine Indwelling, which is clearly taught in the New Testament. "Know ye not," asked St. Paul, "that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, *Who is in you?*" And St. John wrote, "Hereby we know that *He abideth in us* by the Spirit Which He hath given us," and again, "If we love one another, *God dwelleth in us.*" Many hymns refer to this in passing:

Still to the lowly soul
He doth Himself impart,
And for His dwelling and His throne
Chooseth the pure in heart.

O come to my heart, Lord Jesus.
There is room in my heart for Thee.

But this old-world prayer specifies in detail one by one the various parts of the body which we hand over to God and ask Him to control.

It begins with the head. “God be in my head and in my understanding.” The chief end of man is the end with the head on. The handful of grey matter that forms our brain rules the whole body; so it is of vital importance that God should be enthroned there. Our brains need waking up. They are capable of far more work than many of us give them. “Most of us,” wrote Arnold Bennett, “are in a state of semi-coma with minds only exerted to half their capacity.” Mental haziness is moral laziness. Moreover this petition prays specially that our brains may have the gift of understanding. It is fatally easy to know everything and understand nothing. We need to understand ourselves, to understand life, to understand our Religion, to understand other people. What a high compliment it is when someone is described as “such an understanding person!” At every Confirmation the Bishop prays that each candidate may receive “the Spirit of Understanding.” And we make that prayer our own whenever we sing this hymn: “Come, O God, and dwell in my head, and give me a sound understanding.”

Next we pray for our eyes, “God be in mine eyes.” Our Lord said, “The light of the body is the eye.” There was an old-fashioned children’s book called *Eyes and No Eyes*, the story of two boys, one of whom noticed everything, while the other noticed nothing. Eyes need to be trained to see things quickly and accurately. Some of us are terribly unobservant. Our Lord complained of the people round Him that “seeing they see not.” A photographic paper carries the slogan, “There are

pictures everywhere for those who have eyes to see them.” If our eyes were properly focused we should see such lovely things in every country lane that we should exclaim with Mrs. Browning,

Earth’s crammed with Heaven
And every common bush afire with God;

we should see in the men and women we meet such wonderful kindness, patience, self-sacrifice and devotion to duty that their example would inspire us to far nobler living; we should see too innumerable opportunities for usefulness that now we overlook. And we can pray with confidence that our myopia may be healed, for our Lord said, “I am come into this world that they which see not may see.”

Then comes the third prayer: “God be in my mouth and in my speaking.” A tongue is a dangerous possession. The Arabs have a proverb, “A fool’s tongue is always long enough to cut his throat.” “If any man among you,” wrote St. James, “bridleth not his tongue, that man’s religion is vain.” Blunt words often have a terribly sharp edge. The finest command of language is often to say nothing. The things we might have said, but didn’t, have saved us many a friend. Some folk have felt this so keenly that they have taken vows of lifelong silence. There are Indian Sadhus who have not spoken a word for fifty years. The Roman Church has its Silent Orders of monks and nuns—Carthusians, Carmelites, Trappists. But this is surely a mistake. If God meant us to be silent, would He have given us tongues? To deliberately put them out of action is to be like the man in the Parable, who was afraid to do anything with the talent entrusted to him. The power of

speech is given to be used. Charles Péguy, the eloquent French Catholic, even declares: “He who does not bellow the truth when he knows it, makes himself the accomplice of liars.” If God uses even “the mouths of babes and sucklings,” He needs our tongues too. So we may well pray: “God be in my mouth and in my speaking.”

Take my lips, and let them be
Filled with messages from Thee.

The fourth prayer is: “God be in my heart and in my thinking.” Two things are linked together here. Thinking is important. Eastern sages used to teach their disciples one new truth every morning, and then made them sit for twelve hours silently meditating on it. In the bustling West we can hardly adopt quite such leisurely methods; but the Jesuits, who pride themselves on their skill in education, have no evening Prep. in their schools. Instead there is an hour of silence every night, when the boys sit without books thinking over the things they have learnt during the day. The village ploughman and shepherd is often a much wiser man than the town-dweller. He may not know so much, but, what he does know, he has thought about more deeply.

And the quality of our thoughts matters tremendously. Every act springs from a thought. Your thoughts are you. One text says: “As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.” Someone has said: “You are not what you think you are. But what you think—you are.” So this prayer wisely links our thoughts with our hearts, which were believed in olden days to be the source of our emotions. Our emotions are not, as some seem to imagine, a regrettable mistake on the part of our

Creator. “The heart aye’s the part aye that makes us right or wrang.” Thinking that is not warmed by emotion will accomplish about as much as lukewarm water in the boiler of a steam-engine.

And so we reach the final prayer: “God be at mine end and at my departing.” On Will Hay’s tomb are the words: “For each of us there comes a moment, when Death takes us by the hand, and says, It is time to go.” It is well to remember that; but it is not a moment to be dreaded. Death is as natural as birth, and to many a Christian the thought of what awaits him is a great inspiration. When Christian is asked in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* how he overcomes his difficulties, he answers, “When my thoughts wax warm about whither I am going, that does it.” Our hymn uses St. Paul’s favourite word for death, “departing.” He wrote of “having a desire to depart” and “the time of my departure is at hand.” The Greek word *analuō*, that he used, means literally “to weigh anchor and set out for the open sea.” A ship that weighs anchor does not sink. It ceases to be fettered and is free. It would however be nervous work to make that voyage alone; but like Tennyson we can say,

I hope to see my Pilot face to face,
When I have crossed the bar.

In a quiet churchyard in Sussex a grave bears this simple inscription, “Gone home with a Friend.”

CHAPTER XXXII

THE DIVINE IMAGE

To Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love

E.H.; S.P.; Cong.P.

Another poet who in recent years has gained admission to our hymn-books is William Blake, and this lovely little lyric, which he calls *The Divine Image*, comes from his *Songs of Innocence*. It was published in 1789. We shall see in the next chapter that he is not the easiest writer in the world to understand, and even this short hymn, for all its apparent simplicity, commits those who sing it with understanding to some rather startling statements. The first point that has to be settled is this. When Blake speaks of Love manifesting itself in a “human form divine,” is he thinking of Christ, Who “for us men and for our salvation came down from Heaven and was made man,” or is he thinking of Man, made in the image of God and still retaining many qualities that proceed from Him? He might have been thinking of either. Unorthodox as he was in many respects, he believed in the Incarnation. He wrote: “I still and shall to all Eternity adore Him Who is the Express Image of God”; “God became as we are, that we may become as He is.” But it is quite clear that in this hymn he is

speaking not of the Divinity of Christ but of the Divinity of Man. A later volume of his, *Songs of Experience*, contains a deliberate parody on our hymn. The first book represented the point of view of a little child, to whom all adults are Godlike beings full of Mercy, Pity, Love, to whom it can turn in distress. In the second the child, now growing up, takes a darker view of life:

Cruelty has a Human Heart,
And Jealousy a Human Face,
Terror the Human Form Divine.

Since here “the Human Form Divine” obviously means Man, this must have been its meaning in the earlier poem.

Blake was a Mystic of the Extreme Left. He said on one occasion: “Jesus is the only God. But so am I. And so are you.” This sounds the craziest blasphemy. But he was only voicing, in the extravagant and exaggerated way in which he habitually talked, a thought on which in all ages Mystics have loved to dwell, God living and working in the lives of men. In early life he had been for a time a member of the Swedenborgian Society, and this hymn is said to have been written in the room in Hatton Garden in which the followers of the Swedish Seer used to meet for worship. In those early Swedenborgian days he had signed a Manifesto which declared: “All worship directed to a God Invisible tends to destroy everything spiritual in the Church.” This remained his conviction throughout life. A Being so vague and vast as the Great Invisible Spirit, Who fills all things, “Whom no man hath seen or can see,” can only be known in two ways, as He

appeared incarnate in Palestine in the Person of Jesus, and as He still appears incarnate in the lives of His people.

We can see God in the lives of others. But a point that the Mystics emphasized most strongly is that we must learn to find Him first in our own hearts. “God is within us,” said Brother Lawrence, “seek Him not elsewhere.” “Thou seekest God in books,” wrote William Law, “in the Church, in outward exercises, but thou wilt not find Him, till thou hast first found Him in Thy heart.” The words that brought light to Madame Guyon were: “The trouble, Madam, is that you are looking outside for what you have within. Accustom yourself to seek God in your own heart, and you will find Him there.” The Roman Catholic Mystic, Angelus Silesius, even ventures to say:

I am God’s Other Self. He finds in me
What is akin to Himself eternally.

It is rather difficult teaching that lies behind our hymn: God can only be known through Man, through the Man of Nazareth, through our own nature, and through the lives of our neighbours. Blake repeats the thought frequently in his other writings:

Seek not thy Heavenly Father beyond the stars.
Within your bosom I reside.

And he sums up his message in the epigram, “What is Above is Within.”

We are now in a position to look at the hymn in detail. The first line was suggested by St. Jude’s greeting in his

Epistle: “Mercy unto you and peace and love be multiplied”; and Blake expands St. John’s definition, “God is Love,” into

Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love
Is God our Father dear.

True Love always shows itself in Mercy, Pity, and Peace. Blake was fond of this triplet. In another poem he says:

I heard an Angel singing,
When the day was springing,
“Mercy, Pity, Peace
Is the world’s release.”

He had to add Pity to St. Jude’s list for his own heart was intensely pitiful. This appears again and again in his poems. The sight of ill-treated animals filled him with fury:

A robin redbreast in a cage
Puts all Heaven in a rage.
A dog starved at his master’s gate
Predicts the ruin of the State.
A horse misused upon the road
Calls to Heaven for human blood.

John Morley had a quotation from Bacon carved on his mantelpiece, “The nobler a soul is, the more objects of compassion he hath.” St. Teresa even taught her nuns that they must feel pity for the Devil. Blake’s poems throb with compassion for *The Little Black Boy*, whom the English children despised, for *The Little Chimney-Sweepers*, dragged from bed in the dark on frosty mornings to climb sooty

chimneys, for the *Charity Children marching to St. Paul's Cathedral* on Ascension Day, for *A Little Boy Lost*, *A Little Girl Lost*, and so on. And he was convinced that God must feel the same pity too:

Think not that thou canst sigh a sigh,
And thy Maker is not nigh.
Think not that thou canst weep a tear,
And thy Maker is not near.

When a verse once gets into our hymn-books it soon becomes a household word. Winston Churchill wrote recently: "Without an equal growth of Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love, Science herself may destroy all that makes life majestic and tolerable." Everyone recognizes these qualities as "virtues of delight." But Blake's main point is, that to be of any use they must become incarnate. Mercy must move a human heart. Pity must show itself in a human face. Love must make a human form to some extent divine. And then he hastens to add that, whenever they appear in man, it is God Who has placed them there, and it is God Who is manifesting Himself through them. So

all must love the human form
In Heathen, Turk, or Jew.
Where Mercy, Love, and Pity dwell,
There God is dwelling too.

Without becoming adepts at Mysticism, a feat beyond the capacity of most of us, it is a great step forward in our spiritual education, when we learn to recognize the Presence of God wherever we see goodness. The title of one of Tolstoi's stories, *Where Love is, God is*, puts this truth

in a nutshell, though this is not quite the meaning that Tolstoi himself intended. It is a still further step upward, if we can feel His Presence, when the goodness is not very obvious and the capacity for goodness is merely a matter of faith. Among the reputed sayings of our Lord, recorded by Early Fathers but not found in the Gospels, is one vouched for by Tertullian: "He who sees his brother, sees Me." This text is the key to the meaning of Blake's little poem. A London preacher recently startled his large congregation by the challenge, Can you recognize God in the face of a drunken man?

CHAPTER XXXIII JERUSALEM

And did those Feet in ancient time

E.H.; S.P.; A.M.R.; Meth.; Presb.; Cong.P.

Of all Blake's lyrics that in recent years have been set to music as hymns far the most popular is the one known as *Jerusalem*. But how many of those who sing it could explain what it means? It consists of four verses torn from their context in the Preface to one of his most bewildering poems. He was a strange person, a Mystic and Symbolist, who, though his early verses had been fairly simple, in his later writings became almost unintelligible to ordinary mortals; and this poem, which he called *Milton*, had one of his oddest themes. He was an Anarchist who regarded Law as the source of all evil. (Had not St. Paul declared that "the strength of sin is the Law"?) And therefore he hated Puritanism with its innumerable "Thou shalt nots" and Milton, whom he regarded as the Prophet of that system. He pictures him, with eyes opened in Heaven, resolving to return to earth to undo some of the harm that his teaching had done. This might have made a highly exciting and original poem; but in Blake's hands it became a cryptogram of the deadliest dullness. When Bunyan

takes us to Doubting Castle or the Hill Difficulty and introduces us to Mr. Faint-heart or Mr. Worldly Wiseman we know exactly what he means. But when Blake invites us to Bowlahoola or Golgonooza to meet Urizon with his leprous hand, and Zelophelad's daughters with their bloodstained feet, and the small girl Oloron, "the double sixfold wonder," we grope in vain for a clue.

In this obscure and almost unreadable riddle our four verses lay entombed for almost eighty years, till they caught the eye of Stewart Headlam, a London Socialist parson, who published a fiery little paper called *The Church Reformer*. The thought of building in England a New Jerusalem appealed to him strongly, and he printed them as a motto at the head of every issue; and in this way they became familiar to many of the younger clergy. In 1916 the Women's Suffrage Act was passed in the House of Commons, and a great Thanksgiving Service was held in the Albert Hall. For this Sir Hubert Parry, a keen Suffragist, set Blake's words to the splendid tune, which now all England knows. "It has become," wrote *The Times*, "a second National Anthem; nay, if it be not disloyal to say so, it has come to stand for something, which the National Anthem fails to express."

Everyone knows it. Everyone sings it. But how many could answer confidently these four simple questions: (1) What answer—yes or no—did Blake expect to his query, Did Christ "in ancient time walk upon England's mountains"? (2) What were the "dark Satanic mills"? (3) What did he mean by his "chariot of fire"? (4) What kind of "Jerusalem" did he hope to build in England?

To the first question he would undoubtedly have answered Yes. He held strange ideas about Pre-history. In 1548 John Bale, Bishop of Ossory, misled by a forgery supposed to be the work of an ancient Chaldean, had traced the population of Britain back to the Flood. When the sons of Noah spread through the world to repeople it, Samothès, the son of Japhet, settled in England. Three years later the giant Albion, great-grandson of Noah's wicked son Ham, arrived, and gave his name to the island, and between his descendants and the good Japhetites there was perpetual war. This fantastic fiction was accepted for years by reputable scholars like Holinshed; so Blake, a quite self-educated man, cannot be blamed for believing it. But he added fantasies of his own. Like most of his contemporaries he believed in the classical legend of a Golden Age; and with John-Bull patriotism he assumed that England must have been the hub of that Earthly Paradise. He speaks of "Albion, whose history preceded that of the Hebrews," and asks "Was Britain the primitive seat of the Patriarchal Religion?" and answers, "It is true and cannot be controverted." And he added that Christ "by Whom all things were made," must as King of that Golden Age have ruled the world from Britain. In one poem he prays:

O Divine Saviour, arise
Upon the mountains of Albion as in ancient time.

In another he says:

The fields from Islington to Marylebone,
To Primrose Hill and St. John's Wood,
Were builded over with pillars of gold,
And there Jerusalem's pillars stood.

We cannot be expected to share the quaint historical heresies of this erratic dreamer; but need they spoil the hymn for us? All who believe that our Lord was “begotten before all worlds,” and that “without Him was not anything made that was made” can admit that in a mystical sense from the beginning of time Christ had been present unseen in England, longing to make “our clouded hills” His own.

Now for the second question: What were “those dark Satanic mills”? These words are often thought to refer to the Lancashire cotton-mills and the rise of Modern Industrialism. But Blake had never been to Lancashire. London and Sussex were the only parts of England that he knew. To him Satan’s mills were no modern abomination. They had been at work, so the hymn implies, in that “ancient time” before History began. And, when Blake says “Satanic,” he does not mean “bestly.” His “Satanic mills” were the personal property of Satan. They figure in several of his other poems. They belong not to Lancashire but to the Supernatural World. They stood “outside the Gate of Los, intricate, dreadful,” and elsewhere he tells us that “the Gates of Los surround the Universe within and without.” “No mortal man can find that Mill in his pilgrimage of seventy years.” Satan is “the Miller of Eternity,” whose mills are perpetually grinding out false ideas, specious sophistries, and especially from Blake’s point of view stodgy, soul-destroying conventions.

We come now to the central thought of the hymn, the building of Jerusalem. Blake and his wife had been for a time members of the Swedenborgian Church. He did not stay in it long. His was the type of mind that could not be confined within the limits of any creed. But he carried some

of Swedenborg's thoughts into his later writings. One of these was the expectation of the New Jerusalem (Swedenborgians still call their Church the New Jerusalem Church). It is based on the text, "I saw the Holy City, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of Heaven." To make England a real City of God, a little Heaven on earth, this seemed to Blake the ideal that English Christians must work for.

But this would be a tremendous task. It cannot hope to be accomplished unless it is inspired by irresistible desire:

Bring me my bow of burning gold!
Bring me my arrows of desire!

In another poem he wrote of:

The bow of my mind and the arrows of thought.
My bowstring fierce with ardour breathes,
My arrows glow in their golden sheaves.

And more than this is needed:

Bring me my chariot of fire!

Most people probably imagine that this refers to the story of Elijah vanishing from Elisha's sight in a chariot of fire. But that was not Blake's meaning. "Chariot of fire" was his phrase for the feeling of furious indignation that carried Christ into battle against every form of evil. Beneath his picture of Laocoon he engraved:

Jesus bound Satan to His chain,
And, bursting forth, His furious ire

Became a Chariot of Fire.
Throughout the land He took His course,
And tracked diseases to their source.
He cursed the Scribe and Pharisee,
Trampling down Hypocrisy.
Where'er His Chariot took its way
The Gates of Death let in the Day.

Blake realized that Satanic evils have gained such a grip on England that they will never be swept away till tepid, torpid, carpet-knight Christians become fired with righteous indignation and share “the wrath of the Lamb.”

The building of the New Jerusalem will need hard thinking too and careful planning. It will not be enough to have plenty of zeal and plenty of indignation. Head and heart must work together. “I will not cease,” wrote Blake, “from *mental* fight.” And then must come active campaigning. Further problems will arise. The Satanic mills will keep on grinding out fresh weapons. “Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand.” A London clergyman sent this motto to all his congregation: “Soldier of Christ, doth thy sword sleep?”

Blake does not claim to have done more than to have given us a clue to follow:

I have given you the end of a golden string.
Only wind it into a ball
It will lead you into Heaven's gate,
Built in Jerusalem's wall.

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Transcriber's Notes

- Retained publication information from the printed edition: this eBook is public-domain in the country of publication.
- Silently corrected a few palpable typos.
- In the text versions only, text in italics is delimited by underscores.
- Moved the list of hymnals (at the foot of the page in the printed edition) to a place immediately after the hymn title.

[The end of *Sing With the Understanding* by George Reginald Balleine]